

From: Eric Toshalis <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, October 8, 2021 12:27 PM
To: Michel Sewell
Subject: Re: question
Attachments: NYC schools eliminating GATE.pdf

Good question! That it's being asked that way and is being addressed with "let's let a few Black/Brown kids in" approaches suggests the need to strategize about how we might flip the question and expose its impact. Folks are obsessed with identification of "gifted" kids because they are invested in a system that labels, ranks, and sorts humans in order to secure advantages for those who are deemed "worthy." We need to question the legitimacy of that approach, deep as we are in the 21st century and aware as we should be about how this belief is rooted in eugenicist thinking and supremacy. Those who are not deemed "gifted" or "talented" in that ranking/sorting machine get the leftovers: less skilled faculty, less rigorous instruction, less expected of them, less access to enrichment and opportunity, less chances at post-secondary success, etc. The design is what we need to question (partly to keep it from being personal — i.e., "it's the system, stupid"), and a core part of that design is leaving untouched the assumption that we can somehow improve our GATE identification apparatus while the larger system is untouched. This is classic "re-arranging the deck chair on the Titanic" type of rationale, and it's buoyed by White supremacy and dominant cultural assumptions about which categories of students we most value and how to build systems that ensure that advantage. There just aren't defensible forms of GATE identification that exist above and apart from racist, classist, xenophobic, anti-disabled ideologies. They're inextricable. We need to question the very intention to label/rank/sort humans and reveal both the harm it produces and the baseless assumptions on which it stands. It's anti-democratic, unfair, and is ruining lives. As long as schools rely on whatever they think are improved ways of "identifying gifted and talented students" they are not meritocracies.

And of course, we should expect GT leaders and entitled parents to go *out of their minds* when we do this. They benefitted from it and want their kids to benefit from it. There isn't a way through it without confronting that resistance. As Franklin Douglass said, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." The key, I think, will be to show them the damage the current system is causing, show them solutions and how they're consistent with research/statute/policy/ethics, set a pathway for everyone that gives little early wins as we move toward replacing GATE with "enrichment for all," and then divide and conquer when the inevitable camps form. To that end, I am planning to pull together a behind-the-scenes group to start a multi-pronged activist approach to help folks like yourself do what's needed. I'd love for you to join us — we'd need to keep it on the DL for awhile until we have the ground game established and can move the pieces on the chess board. This would

allow you to keep moving with GT folks, keep supporting students and staff, establish the need for an “enrichment coordinator” that replaces the need for a GATE leader so you can keep your position and make your impact even MORE amazing, make sure the prevailing winds are at your back, and all the while make the system more equitable.

Anyway, psyched you’re thinking about these core problems and how to address them. Thanks for reaching out. WE CAN DO THIS!!!! YOU ARE NOT ALONE!!!! See the attached from today’s NYTimes, for example...

— ET

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Email: [REDACTED]
Web: EngagingResistance.com
Books: [Make Me!](#) (2015), [Understanding Youth](#) (2006)

Other cool stuff:

- Articles I’ve written in *Educational Leadership*: [here](#) and [here](#)
- Webinars on how to engage student resistance: [this one](#), and [another](#)
- A [podcast](#) featuring my take on engagement, equity, and instructional design
- A [resource on student engagement](#) in today’s hybrid learning environments, with curated resources [here](#)
- Resources, toolkits, and PD on student motivation, engagement, and voice at [this site](#)
- Article on rethinking perseverance [here](#)
- A resource I created for educators and leaders: [10 drivers of student engagement you can use right now](#)
- My op-ed on [why teens are rad](#)
- Blog series on equity I curated [here](#), plus a short video on a convening I hosted [here](#), and another one [here](#)
- A [blog](#) on a national [project](#) I’m leading
- My recent chapter in the [Handbook of Urban Education](#) on GYO programs
- An online learning module for teachers I co-developed with friends at Stanford [here](#)
- Sample scholarship [here](#) and [here](#)
- Stirring up trouble [here](#), [there](#), and [here also](#)

From: Michel Sewell <MSewell@blaineschools.org>
Date: Friday, October 8, 2021 at 11:32 AM
To: "Dr. Eric Toshalis" <[REDACTED]>
Subject: question

Genuine question I have...

Why the obsession with identification of gifted? Is that purely a response to educational law? We spend so much time, energy, and resources on this part of GT! It's often used in our district as an excuse for why we can't help more kids - the facilitators are too overburdened as it is. What if instead, we used that same time, energy, and resources to serve all kids' needs, including in response to the PLC question 4 - What do we do when they already know it?