

## Book review



**Michelle Juratowitch & Rosanne Blundell (2014). *Make a twist: Curriculum differentiation for gifted students*. Toowong, Qld: Gredbrook.**

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Available from <http://www.clearingskies.com.au/>

Differentiating the curriculum is understood to be a requisite skill of the professional teacher (AITSL, 2014, Standard 1.5). Graduate teachers know and understand strategies to differentiate their teaching. Proficient teachers incorporate differentiated strategies in their classroom activities. Highly accomplished teachers use student assessment data to evaluate differentiated programs. Lead teachers guide and support colleagues to evaluate the effectiveness of differentiated programs. Differentiated teaching and learning experiences address the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities – including, of course, outstanding or high-ability students.

While classroom teachers can access many resources for remediation of students with learning difficulties or with gaps in their knowledge and skills, they tend to be bereft of good pedagogical support when it comes to engaging and challenging a student with high ability. On the whole, it would be fair to say that the Australian educational landscape is littered with the skeletons and carapaces of myriad “differentiated” lesson plans. The shifting sands of context, externally driven curriculum and misapplication of models can be particularly unforgiving. To be sure, the two GERRIC books on *Differentiating the curriculum* by Gross and her colleagues (Gross, MacLeod, Drummond & Merrick, 2001; Gross, MacLeod & Pretorius, 1999) have apparently been well-received, but they are about fifteen years old now, and offer perhaps not the most user-friendly approach to the problem.

*Make a twist*, on the other hand, provides a practical way for teachers to differentiate appropriately for the gifted child in the classroom. It was at first conceived and designed for use by individual students in upper primary school and in the middle school, and then was further developed following feedback from a selection of students, parents and teachers. It is set firmly within the conceptual framework of Maker’s (1982) model for curriculum modifications to provide complex and challenging learning activities and tasks.

There are two key “twists” to this resource book. First, the book can be twisted or flipped, depending on the reader’s perspective. Side B is for Educators and Parents. Maker’s (1982) model is concisely outlined, and separate notes for educators and for parents indicate how the Juratowitch and Blundell interpretation of it may be implemented. Side A is for Students, with a four-step process for approaching the activities and tasks, and a glossary of terms used. And within Side A lies the second twist. The main part of the student section comprises seven ways of “viewing classwork differently” (content modifications), seven ways of “thinking at a deeper level” (process modifications), and seven ways of “twisting the product” (product modifications), each of which can be combined with the others.

*Make a twist* is certainly a very flexible resource. Do I have any issues with it? I like the colour, but some of the shading on the text boxes made me a tad sea-sick. The pages are quite durable (I tested my copy with some doses of water and making dog-ears in the corners of the student pages), but the price of AU\$30 plus postage and packaging for 32 pages (two of which were for placing orders) appears to be a wee bit steep. And the appearance of zero in-text references and three pages of “bibliography” (proof reading was needed here) seems more than an oversight in a book that should be modelling good referencing practice to high-ability students.

Nevertheless, both teachers and parents will be attracted by the title, anticipating *Make a twist* to be a valuable resource for differentiating their classroom practice, or for supporting the learning of their child. For me, the strengths of the book lie in the ways in which it opens up a dialogue between the teacher and the student, and sets the scene for a negotiated and constructive approach to learning.

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