

4-1-2011

Gifted Students Need Special Programs to Achieve Their Fullest Potential

Kasie-Marie Smith
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai>

Recommended Citation

Smith, Kasie-Marie (2011) "Gifted Students Need Special Programs to Achieve Their Fullest Potential," *ESSAI*: Vol. 9, Article 38.
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol9/iss1/38>

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. It has been accepted for inclusion in ESSAI by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. For more information, please contact koteles@cod.edu.

Gifted Students Need Special Programs to Achieve Their Fullest Potential

by Kasie-Marie Smith

(Education 1100)

Abstract

This paper explores the categorization and mindset of gifted students. Examining what qualifies a student to be of the “gifted” level is the first step to recognizing if there are such students in a teacher’s classroom, whether it is based off of an IQ (Intelligence Quotient) test or Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences. After understanding the fundamentals and work ethics of these students, many researchers and teachers support the use of special programs that push the students to their fullest potential. Gifted and Talented (G/T) homogeneous programs are the best choice for challenging these special individuals as they otherwise can suffocate in a regular classroom with boredom and frustration.

Gifted Students Need Special Programs to Achieve Their Fullest Potential

Our public school system is filled with a variety of different individuals. There are the classic jocks, preps and punks, as well as the geeks, nerds and dorks. In the midst of crowded classrooms and busy hallways, a certain type of individual is too often socially spotlighted but more often than not ignored on the academic front. Gary Davis (2006), author of *Gifted Children, Gifted Education*, explains that the words “giftedness” and “intelligence” are not synonymous of one another (p. 1). In today’s school system, “giftedness” refers mostly to high general aptitude while “intelligence” is the “ability to induce relationships and correlates” (Davis, 2006, p. 2). Intelligence expert Arthur Jensen tested simple reaction time between individuals and found that those with faster reaction times correlated with other features of higher basic intelligence. Common characteristics of gifted students linking to the Jensen’s simple reaction time tests included early and rapid learning, superior reasoning and problem solving, efficient with numbers, uses high-level thinking skills, as well as thinking that is abstract, complex, logical, insightful, and flexible (Davis, 2006, p. 28). These attributes are what really set apart the gifted individuals from their peer group. From Jensen’s research, it was deduced that the brains of individuals with a higher intelligence thought at a more rapid, efficient, and accurate pace (Davis, 2006, pg. 3).

Official intelligence testing produces IQ scores, with general intelligence meaning what is shared between the IQ tests. Another theory of intelligence tells us that our basic mental ability of “fluid intelligence,” declines after a person is 20 years old but our accumulated information of “crystallized intelligence” of collected information overtime never decreases. While the average IQ score is 100, there is a normal curve that forms when deviations and differences in IQ scores are graphed. When looking for gifted students, these individuals fall on the right of the bell curve with an IQ of 130 and above (Davis, 2006, p. 5). By looking at a bell curve, one can see that students with a moderately high IQ scored 120 to 140 and those with higher intelligence scored above 180 (Davis, 2006, p. 9). The fluidity of the normal bell curve is a visual example why it is difficult to categorize individuals as solely being gifted and not gifted. According to Davis (2006), students are considered for G/T Programs through a variety of standards such as the Stanford-Binet and WISC IQ test scores, school grades, and teacher/parent recommendations (p. 28). Apart from these considerations, some schools define giftedness as “strictly high intelligence” with a firm IQ minimum of 125 or 130. Other schools might specify a percentage that will be selected through ranking students or in addition to IQ levels, seek students that are talented in music or art. With all of these variations, even an isolated

G/T class will have its own bell curve (Davis, 2006, p. 29).

Beyond a single IQ score, teachers must realize that there are many types of giftedness such as those identified in Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence. These types of intelligences include Natural, Musical, Logical, Existentialist, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Verbal, and Visual (Davis, 2006, p. 15). Gardner's philosophies are more widely known than those of Robert Sternberg who describes only three types of intelligences: Analytic, Creative, and Practical (Davis, 2006, p. 15).

It is at an early age that bright individuals know they are different from their peers and perceive that they are judged as odd. As gifted children enter elementary school, patterns of issues develop in the lives of these secluded children. One problem identified by Leta Hollingworth regarding the situation these exceptional children are in is their "emotional vulnerability." This term is used to describe very bright children who understand ethical and philosophical issues before they are emotionally ready to do so (Davis, 2006, p. 9). Another early founder that studied gifted children's social trends was Miraca Gross. Gross focused on high-IQ children's opinion on school and the correlation to how much they were academically accelerated. Gross found that high-IQ children that were impeded from grade acceleration had very negative and bitter attitudes toward school. In comparison, the high-IQ children that had one or two years grade acceleration but were still above their peers were only moderately pleased with school while the children that were radically accelerated through major grade skipping felt happiest because they felt their academic, social and emotional needs were being met (Davis, 2006, p. 10). Today, the philosophies and research of both Hollingworth and Gross has set the stage for grade acceleration for gifted individuals and supports the creation of challenging and homologous academic peer grouping for a successful student. Both of these contributors to education have seen firsthand how gifted children suffer in the mainstreamed classroom as their needs are ignored because they are thought of as already having an advantage.

In Deborah Ruf's (2005) book, *Losing Our Minds*, there are many accounts of the frustration on behalf of gifted children and their parents when the child's talents are not appropriately addressed in schools. Noting the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, the focus in schools has been mostly on raising the achievement of students with learning difficulties and have ironically left the accelerated children behind (Ruf, 2005 p. 232). Ruf identifies specific issues with the school systems that are problematic for these atypical students including the "physical structure and layout; grouping children by age; attitudes towards grade skipping, tracking, and ability grouping; and changes in educational philosophy and advocacy, resulting in a shift of values, priorities, and funding" (Ruf, 2005 p. 232). According to Ruf (2005), children learn to underachieve when they have already mastered material that is over repeated for their slower peers. This in turn can cause a distorted and negative self-concept when both they and their peers are scoring similarly despite the still obvious academic gap. With mixed-ability grouping, students are put together who have different interests, perceptions, and sense of humor. "Gifted children require an emotionally safe and supportive environment while they are young and still learning about their place in the world" (Ruf, 2005, p. 242).

Rosemary Callard-Szulgit is also among those who believe that it is a myth that cooperative learning in heterogeneous groups provides academic benefits for gifted and talented students (Ruf, 2005, p. xiii). With mixed abilities, cooperative learning should be limited and only for social skill development. Likewise, it is a reality that in G/T programs, the challenges and choices available to accelerated students are "major influences on increasing student achievement and motivation" (Ruf, 2005, p. xiv). Themes such as leadership, a supporting and positive atmosphere, strong communication, and commitment to students through the curriculum are found in exemplary G/T programs and create the perfect environment for gifted kids to thrive in. Susan Winegrener (2001), author of *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom*, supports the use of homogeneous ability

grouping as “gifted students already know much of what teachers are planning” in the curriculum and can develop unproductive work habits once they conclude that “being smart means doing things easily” (p. 2). Winebrenner (2001) continues to say that the longer that gifted kids are “allowed to believe this, the harder it is to rise to the challenge when they finally encounter one” (p. 1). Expanding on the studies of Hollingworth and Gross earlier mentioned, high self-esteem is only reached by these students when “they are successful at something they perceived to be difficult” (Winebrenner, 2001, p. 2).

It is required by law that accommodations be met to students with disabilities so that the students can succeed. Why is it that the gifted children should be ignored? In a mainstreamed classroom that is heterogeneous in ability, the system is actually punishing the gifted students. While much research supports the end of tracking programs, it is essential for this specific type of learner to have special programs so they are constantly engaged and growing as individuals. Even though some teachers argue that the traditional classroom setting can suffice for the needs of all students, one must ask themselves if it is realistic and fair if the majority of classroom time is spent focusing on the lower functioning students, then the average students, and then lastly the gifted students. Differentiated instruction and technology integration is a possibility that many teachers are exploring to close this gap. Mara Sapon-Shevin (1994), author of *Playing Favorites*, brings up a valid point that the rights to a free and appropriate education to meet educational needs should not just be for those that are disabled. If the same rights are not extended to the gifted students, they are indeed being handicapped (Sapon-Shevin, 1994, p. 143). Just because a child has a high IQ doesn't mean that they are not worth the time to teach new material and challenge.

References

- Callard-Szulgit R. (2005). *Teaching the gifted in an inclusion classroom*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press. (p. xii-xiv)
- Davis, G. (2006). *Gifted children, gifted education*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press. (p. 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 15, 28, 29).
- Ruf, D. (2005). *Losing our minds*. Great Potential Press. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press. (p. 232, 242).
- Sapon-Shevin, M. (1994). *Playing favorites*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. (p. 143).
- Winebrenner S. (2001). *Teaching gifted kids in the regular classroom*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing. (p. 2).