

Research on Gifted Education

What is the best way to serve gifted and talented students?

Feldhusen (1998) states, "Gifted children thrive and learn best in special classes where they are together on a daily basis for all or most of the school day. Special classes are also more cost-effective. [They] simply involve regrouping gifted children into a class of typical size for the school and having one teacher serve them just as one teacher would serve a mixed group of the same number of students." VanTassel-Baska, Willis, and Meyers (1989) studied full-time, self-contained classes for gifted students and found very positive effects. Felhusen and Slayer (1990) found very positive results for student motivation, attitudes, and achievement in a statewide study of special classes for gifted.

Can the needs of gifted and talented students be met in the regular classroom?

Research demonstrates that the academic needs of gifted children are not met in the regular classroom. A report from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1993) found that regular school curriculum does not challenge gifted and talented students. Most academically talented students have already mastered up to one half of the required curriculum offered to them in elementary school.

Classroom teachers do little to accommodate the different learning needs of gifted children. In an observational study, Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, Salvin (1993) found little or no differentiation in instructional and curricular practices in the regular classroom. One study found that the students observed received no instructional or curricular differentiation in 84% of the instructional activities in which they participated (Westberg, et al. 1993). Research indicates that regular classroom teachers are not attempting to adjust curriculum or instruction to meet the academic needs of the gifted student.

Delcourt, Loyd, Cornell, Goldberg (1994) found that gifted children in pull-out, separate class, and special school programs showed higher achievement than gifted students who were not in programs, and in most cases, than those from within-class programs. The results of their study indicate that the longer gifted students are placed together in specialized classes, the greater their gains academically.

Shouldn't gifted and talented students remain in the regular classroom as role models for other students?

Gifted and talented students are found not to be the best role models for other students because they often demonstrate quick mastery of content and can discourage those who struggle for mastery. Felhusen (1989) states, "watching someone of similar ability succeed at a task raises the observer's feeling of efficacy and motivates them to try the task, hence the superiority of 'coping' role models over 'mastery' role models. Coping models gradually improve their performance after some effort and are

thus effective models for peers who will also have to struggle to achieve academically. Master models (often the gifted), on the other hand, demonstrate perfect performance from the outset. Removing gifted students from regular classrooms does not deprive other students of role models, instead, it allows others to be leaders and top performers" (Feldhusen, 1989).

Do separate programs for gifted children lead to feelings of superiority and elitism?

Students from separate class programs scored at the highest levels of achievement and the lowest levels of perception of academic competence when compared to gifted students from the regular classroom (Delcourt et al., 1994). Possibly, challenging curriculum and competition among academic peers may lead to lower perception of self. Silverman (1983) points out that "elitism has been misdirected at the gifted...There is no evidence that grouping gifted children fosters snobbery" (Newland, 1976).

Silverman argues that a false sense of one's importance is more likely to result from being at the top in one's class all the way through school with little need to study. Grouping gifted children together usually diminishes feelings of superiority. The research shows that Inclusion (or heterogeneous grouping) lowers the academic self-concepts of *low-ability* students (Wilson, 1992), whereas homogeneous grouping lowers the academic self-concepts of *high-ability* students (Gibbons et al., 1994).

How do we insure that gifted children will learn to get along with everyone?

The social growth of the gifted is paradoxical. The research shows that gifted children have excellent social skills and relate well to age peers (Janos & Robinson, 1985; Robinson & Noble, 1991). However, clinical reports reveal that many of these well-adjusted students suffer loneliness and inner conflicts between a desire to fit in and their ideals (Silverman, 1993). Silverman explains that advanced students tend to be socially mature, empathetic and solve problems. These traits are valued by their age peers and often they are selected as leaders. Silverman states "The aim of social development of the gifted should not be fitting in with age peers; this is a short-sighted goal. The goals should be wholeness of the individual... "

Ever since gifted children were first studied, it was found that they select friends who are their mental age rather than their chronological age (Gross, 1989; Hollingworth, 1931; Mann, 1957; O'Shea, 1960; Robinson & Noble, 1991; Terman, 1925). Roedell (1985) found that gifted children develop socially more easily when they interact with their mental peers.

What are the essential elements of exemplary programs for gifted and talented students?

Themes In exemplary gifted and talented programs identified included: Leadership (strong administrative voice to represent and implement the program); Atmosphere and

Environment (supportive, accepting, and positive throughout the school); Communication (clear and frequent between and among parents, teachers, students, and administrators);

Curriculum and Instruction (teachers' flexibility in matching to students' needs); and Attention to Student Needs (commitment to serving students from traditionally underrepresented populations), In addition, the exemplary programs were found to influence student achievement and motivation through exposure to challenge and choices (Delcourt et al., 1994).

What percent of gifted and talented students are at risk?

Several factors put gifted and talented students at risk. Silverman (1993) describes gifted as being out of step with their aged peers. The rates of their cognitive, emotional and physical development are out of sync with their chronological aged peers. Therefore, they are thinking about concepts and goals beyond their age and feel they do not, cannot, or should not fit in with aged peers.

Underachievement is also a concern, the gifted constitute America's largest group of underachievers (Reis. 1998). Other at risk factors include behavioral problems, disabilities, gender, low income, cultural diversity peer and social relationships and school environment, It is estimated that about 20 to 25 percent of gifted children have social and emotional difficulties, a rate about twice as high as one finds in populations of school children at large (Janos and Robinson, 1985).

