

Teaching Gifted and Talented Learners

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1.0 Introduction

Gifted and talented students are more academically capable than their peers and therefore need additional academic challenges, (Clive, 1991). These students are commonly integrated into standard classes, so they must be provided with enrichment activities that they can complete independently. To ensure that your gifted and talented students receive the added enrichment they need, prepare and implement activities that allow them to demonstrate their abilities and to continue to build their base of content information.

2.0 Gold Sheet Challenges

Before teaching a lesson, create a slightly more difficult version of the activity than the general student population will complete. For example, if other students are asked to answer comprehension questions about a written piece, compose another assignment in which you ask gifted students to apply the information in the written work to their own lives. Print out these more challenging assignments on bright yellow paper, immediately setting them apart from the standard lesson. When you hand these assignments to your gifted students, make it clear that the work is extra challenging because you believe in their abilities (Kinga, 2010). As other students see these special papers, they too will want to develop the skills necessary to complete them,(Kinga, 2010). If these other students excel in a certain activity or topic, allow them to attempt to complete the gold sheet challenges as well.

Approaches in dealing with gifted and talented learners

Dealing with talented and gifted learners can be hectic for a teacher. Thus, proper designing of activities and use of resources is fundamental.

2.1 Activities that encourage Working independently

Gifted students commonly finish work more rapidly than their classmates, (Kinga, 2010). If you do not have a prepared activity for them when they finish their regular classwork, learning time

will be lost. Working independently on the study of a favorite author will ensure that gifted students always have work to fill in the gaps created by their faster working speed. Allow each gifted student to select a children's or young adult author. Obtain copies of the writer's books and allow the student to read them. Let the student explore the author's life by pointing him toward print or on-line resources with related information. Allow the student to select a project to complete, letting him decide how he would like to show what he has learned about his author's life and works.

2.2 Fact Presentation

Allow your gifted students to expand their understanding while helping their classmates learn. Assign each gifted student a topic that you intend to cover later in the year. Provide the student with resources related to the assigned topic, and instruct him to gather information independently from these resources, (Kinga, 2010). Once the student has developed an understanding of the assigned topic, help him create a PowerPoint presentation that effectively shares the information he has learned. When it's time to teach the topic, let each student present his PowerPoint presentation to the class, sharing his discoveries with his peers.

2.3 Revision and recursion

It should involve a careful evaluation by teachers and other educators of what has occurred as a result of implementing a particular instructional design module or unit of study, (Sutherland, 2005). At this stage of the process, decisions should be made about the nature and extent of revision necessary to improve the model or whether other alternative models should replace it. Revisiting each chapter in the design model is useful in deciding what revisions may be most appropriate. Assessment results may suggest a need for more activities to support a learning outcome, a more effective instructional strategy to teach a concept, or a broader array of resources, (Sutherland, 2005). Careful assessment of each of these possibilities is important to improve learning the next time around.

2.4 Project Based Learning (P.B.L)

PBL (sometimes also referred to as project-based learning) can motivate students through the use of real and authentic problems, (Sutherland, 2005). It can challenge students of varying ability levels and interests to tackle aspects of a selected problem that are appropriate to them, and can

cover multiple interdisciplinary objectives in a single scenario, (Sally and Joseph 2004). In addition, in-class modifications can support meager specialized programs in times of budget crunch.

Self-motivated students and exciting curriculum can energize teachers, and involving students in real problems in the community can create positive relationships with parents and community members. PBL has the potential to impact today in a positive manner the many difficulties facing classrooms, (Sutherland, 2005). The rest of this discussion will focus on just one of these positive areas, that of providing an appropriately challenging learning environment for highly capable students. While PBL can motivate and engage students of all ability levels, it is an elegant way to facilitate the characteristics of gifted education that can be difficult for teachers to infuse in their classrooms using more traditional methods.

When setting up a problem scenario for a gifted student, the teacher must make sure that the content is advanced and that the problem deals with complex concepts, (Sutherland, 2005). The teacher must be careful to point out connections among disciplines related to the topic. The students should gain practice in good reasoning, in forming habits of mind within the disciplines used, and in improving skills of self-direction, (Roberta, 1998). They should also have the chance to discuss conflicting ethical perspectives surrounding the topic. As an example, a middle school problem about using genetically engineered products in fast food restaurants would deal with science curriculum regarding genetics that might not have been covered in the traditional curriculum at that point.

The teacher might need to point out relationships between genetic engineering in plants as well as in humans and the problem might also include a discussion regarding religious beliefs in various cultures, (Sally and Joseph 2004). Such a problem might involve a study of how geneticists work. Students might create a plan for a series of experiments that they feel are needed in order to resolve the issue. They might also take on the roles of farmers, scientists, consumers, media reporters, or businesspersons in order to view the problem from the various perspectives of stakeholders in such a problem, (Sutherland, 2005). These suggestions all relate to the types of characteristics of PBL that are important to consider when setting up a problem

for highly capable students. It is also important to note that such a problem will cover many curriculum standards related to science, social studies, technology, language arts, health, and math. Depending on the activities that are designed and the products that are created by students, this problem could also cover standards within the creative and performing arts and world languages, (Margaret, 2008).

So many wide-ranging objectives can be achieved by employing PBL in the classroom that educators should be encouraged to try it if they have not already, (Roberta, 1998). In order to be successful, teachers should pay attention to a few helpful hints. It may be important to start slowly, using small, directed problem scenarios that are designed for the readiness level of independence and collaboration of the students in the class or group, (Margaret, 2008). It is critical to plan well and to cover the basic information that will be needed in the problem first. The content should drive the activity; the activity should not drive the content. Remember that the depth of the learning is more valuable than covering a lot of content. Make sure the activities are engaging, thought provoking, and authentic, (Margaret, 2008). When assessing students, use a rubric that clearly defines what high quality is and do not emphasize aspects of the products that are not germane to the objective of the problem. (Sally and Joseph, 2004). Enjoy your new role as facilitator and guide!

When the going gets tough, and it could in the beginning, teachers should be reminded that research on PBL, though still scarce, is showing positive results that hold promise for gifted students as well as all students, (Sally and Joseph 2004). Students using PBL perform as well on standardized tests and often better than students in traditional classrooms, (Roberta, 1998). Students using PBL learn research skills, understand the subject matter at a deeper level than students taught by traditional methods, and are more deeply engaged in their work. Also important is the finding that teachers and parents of students learning by doing projects are pleased about students' enthusiasm and hard work when they are doing PBL.

3.0 Resources for Gifted and Talented Learners

Handling gifted and talented learners requires not only sound teachers but also well selected teaching and learning resources. This section closely examines human resources and material resource factor (Kinga, 2010).

3.1 Human Resource

In regard to human resources, certain groups of people would contribute greatly in the education of the talented and the gifted. These include the following:

- Guest speakers
- Mentors
- Community volunteers
- Professional such as practicing writers, artist, scientists.

For the students to understand how knowledge is generated in the real world, the utilization of human resource which is fundamental is employed. Use of human resource paves way for the application of the knowledge (Kinga, 2010).

3.2 Material resources

Gifted and talented learners need materials of various types which are essential to the learners curricular and these must be selected carefully.

3.2.1 Selecting resources

According to Kinga (2010), there are key issues that are considered in choosing material resources used in the programme for the gifted, these include the following:

- I. The materials should address the learners' outcome of the programme.
- II. The reading level should be appropriate for the gifted learners at the given stage of development. Educators for the gifted need to determine the reading level of all texts considered for the programme to ensure challenging reading behaviors for the gifted.
- III. The materials should be organized by key concepts rather isolated skills.
- IV. The material should include ideas for discussion at higher level of thinking. It should include questions that tap into analytical, synthetic and evaluative thinking.
- V. The materials include ideas for group and independent project investigations.
- VI. Problems set are organized from simple to complex to allow gifted learners to extend off-level as appropriate.

- VII. Materials should offer diversity of learning; providing alternative means to attain and within the curriculum frame work.
- VIII. The materials provide opportunities for creative thinking, for challenging assumptions and offering alternative solutions.
- IX. The materials encourage gifted learners to consult multiple resources on given topics i.e. the materials should encourage further exploration of ideas. Good bibliographies and resources suggestions in both print and non printer form are important.

4.0 Conclusion

Many parents believe their children are gifted. The problem is there are many areas of exceptionality, and sometimes overachievers or bright children may seem gifted to the inexperienced observer. Indeed, many schools encourage skipping grades to help challenge gifted students. This is a mistake if the child cannot accept the social ramifications. In addition, and this is very important, it puts students at a real disadvantage when taking tests. That extra year of preparation and maturity could be worth many points and make the difference between the school of choice and the others. Remember, with grade inflation, many students have straight-A averages. National exam scores and community and extracurricular work separate students from the pack. So, the best way to help a gifted child is to challenge them and expand their interests, while providing depth in their gifted areas.

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