The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented

NRC G/T

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NRC/GT: Assessing Instructional and Curricular Strategies

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Designing instructional and curricular strategies requires thoughtful preparation and reflection. The ultimate goal remains prominent: Enhance and extend the learning and understanding of teachers and their students. This goal cannot be reached unless there is a judicious approach to reviewing curricula in response to questions such as:

1. What do children need to know, understand, and do as a result of their involvement with curricula?
2. To what extent are curricular objectives matched to the students' academic diversity?
3. Which instructional and curricular strategies will ratchet up the challenge level of curricula?

Modifying, differentiating, and enriching the curricula are three approaches to preparing responses to the questions above. Essentially, the first step in trying to differentiate curricula to meet students' needs is to analyze its quality. Curriculum modification "involves the analysis, evaluation, and improvement of existing curriculum units and lesson plans. Modified units increase challenge, authenticity, and active learning to improve learning and achievement" (Burns et al., 2003, p. 18). To what extent do you practice curriculum modification? Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Modification

	Agree	Disagree	
1.	☐	☐	I modify units to increase challenge, authenticity, and active learning.
2.	☐	☐	I analyze objectives and determine if they focus on facts, concepts, or principles.
3.	☐	☐	I review my curriculum objectives and determine the extent to which they represent powerful objectives and big ideas.
4.	☐	☐	I analyze lessons or curriculum units and make decisions to eliminate or change teaching and learning activities.

If you already implement the modification strategies, then you should also consider employing curriculum differentiation strategies. Curriculum Differentiation is a

> process teachers use to enhance learning to improve the match between the learner's unique characteristics and various curriculum components. Differentiation involves making changes in the depth or breadth of student learning. Differentiation is enhanced with the use of appropriate classroom management, varied pedagogy, pretesting, flexible small groups, access to support personnel, and the availability of appropriate resources. (Burns et al., 2003, p. 33)

There are many ways to differentiate curriculum to ensure its relevance and complexity to students with varying needs. Four strategies are good starting points. Do you agree or disagree that the following are part of your instructional and curriculum repertoires?

(continued on page 2)

(continued from page 1)

Differentiation

	Agree	Disagree	
1.	☐	☐	I add breadth to the curriculum by providing different alternatives and choices.
2.	☐	☐	I use flexible grouping to meet the academic needs of all students.
3.	☐	☐	I use tiered assignments (i.e., multiple assignments) for the same objective and vary the complexity.
4.	☐	☐	I vary the depth, complexity, format, and nature of resources, activities, and assignments.

Enrichment consists of exposing students to a wide variety of topics, issues, and activities beyond the existing curriculum; using methods and materials to promote critical and creative thinking and investigative skills; and promoting investigative activities and artistic productions in which the learner assumes the role of a first-hand inquirer and a practicing professional. Do you agree or disagree with the use of the following?

Enrichment

	Agree	Disagree	
1.	☐	☐	I use interest groups in which students pursue individual or small group projects.
2.	☐	☐	I use real world problems as one way of making learning more meaningful.
3.	☐	☐	I assess students' knowledge about a topic before beginning a new unit.
4.	☐	☐	I have students use advanced methodological skills (e.g., computer searches, survey techniques).

Self-Report Using the Implementation Strategies Questionnaire for Teachers

For purposes of this article, selected items from the Implementation Strategies Questionnaire for Teachers (Gubbins et al., 2002) followed the definitions of modification, differentiation, and enrichment. Selected items represent strategies that require the careful critique of existing curricular materials and resources; the adaptation of curricula in response to students' needs, strengths, motivation, and learning styles; and the enhancement of learning opportunities or the replacement of mastered content.

Review your responses to the various instructional and curricular practices. If you agreed with several items related to modification, differentiation, and enrichment, perhaps you just need to continue your current approaches to teaching and learning if they have served you and your students well. If you disagreed with several strategies, think about different ways to incorporate the strategies in your curricula. Monitor your progress in using the strategies and reflect on the extent to which your learning and that of your students improves. How will practicing one or more strategies help you recognize and nurture the varied strengths and abilities of students? Assessing instructional and curricular strategies provides opportunities for all educators to revisit lessons, units, and curriculum materials. Think about strategies that are appropriate for you and your students and choose one or more to add to your repertoire.

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The Results of the Replication of the Classroom Practices Survey Replication in Two States

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Have teachers' classroom practices changed in the 10 years since the Classroom Practices Study was conducted by The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) (Archambault et al., 1993)? We replicated the Classroom Practices Survey Study in two states in Spring 2002 to address this question. An overview of the rationale, procedures, results, and conclusions of the replication study are described in this article.

Many readers of the *NRC/GT Newsletter* are familiar with the Classroom Practices Survey Study. The original survey was administered to over 7,000 third and fourth grade teachers throughout the country to determine the extent to which high ability/gifted students receive curriculum and instruction that is different from what their average performing peers receive in regular classroom settings. A major finding from the study was that third and fourth grade teachers make only minor modifications in the regular curriculum to meet the needs of their high ability/gifted students. This result was the same regardless of the geographic region of the teachers or the type of communities in which they taught.

In the years since this study was conducted, people have inquired periodically about the degree to which the findings describe teachers' classroom practices today. In addition, differentiation has become a more widely used term, and many districts focus their professional development experiences around this topic. Hence, it was an appropriate time to replicate the survey study.

Brief Background

After the publication of the Classroom Practices Survey Study, a few researchers investigated differentiation practices in general education classrooms using the original or modified questionnaire at the elementary and middle school level. For example, Whitton (1997) replicated the study with 606 third and fourth grade teachers in New South Wales, Australia and found that the results were nearly identical to the findings from the original study in the United States. Robinson (1998) adapted the instrument for a Middle School Survey of Classroom Practices, which was administered to 1,008 seventh grade teachers across the United States. His results indicated no meaningful differences in curriculum for high achieving and average students in heterogeneous and homogeneous classrooms in the major content areas.

NRC/GT researchers have conducted intervention studies designed to help classroom teachers make more appropriate modifications for advanced learners. For example, Tomlinson et al. (1995) conducted a 3-year project to describe how preservice teachers in three states developed an awareness of the needs of academically diverse learners to implement or modify instruction for meeting those needs. Despite increased awareness of the varied readiness levels and needs of academically diverse students, novice teachers had difficulty making appropriate accommodations for this student population. In another NRC/GT study, an investigation on curriculum compacting, teachers who received professional development on the curriculum compacting process were able to implement the procedure with their most capable students (Reis & Westberg, 1994).

In the last issue of the *NRC/GT Newsletter*, Gubbins (2003) discusses how the classroom practices instrument could be used for a self-study of teachers' practices. Thus, the original instrument has been modified by some researchers and is used today for a variety of purposes.

Procedures for the Replication

For the replication study, we used the original questionnaire—The Classroom Practices Teacher Survey. The only change we made on the instrument

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)

was the removal of several demographic items. The questionnaire contains 39 items regarding classroom practices, including:

- Use pretests to determine if students have mastered the materials covered in a particular unit or content area.
- Make time available for students to pursue self-selected interests.
- Provide a different curricular experience by using a more advanced curriculum unit on a teacher-selected topic.

Teachers were asked to respond to the items using a 5-point scale, ranging from 0 = never to 5 = more than once a day, indicating the frequency to which they use classroom practices with both average performing and high ability students. Factor analyses in the original study indicated that the 39 items comprise 6 factors—Questioning and Thinking (QT), Providing Challenges and Choices (Chall.), Reading and Writing Assignments (R/W), Curricular Modifications (CMod), Enrichment Centers (ECtr.), and Seatwork (SWrk.). The alpha reliability of the 39 items for the replication sample was r = .94 and r□= .90 for average and gifted items, respectively

Due to the expense associated with survey research done on a large scale, we conducted the survey in just two states. We selected two states that differ in two aspects: one state has a gifted and talented (g/t) mandate and is located in the Southeast, and the other state does not have a mandate and is located in the Midwest. We purchased a stratified random sample list of teachers from Market Data Retrieval, Inc., a nationally recognized leader in school survey and market research. The sample was stratified by community type (rural, suburban, and urban) and grade level (third grade, fourth grade.) This resulted in a sample of 1,366 teachers, which is 17% of the third and fourth grade teachers in the two selected states.

To maximize the response rate, we mailed a pre-notification letter to teachers informing them the survey was forthcoming. Two weeks later, we sent the actual questionnaire with an incentive (a bookmark) and a postage paid return envelope. A follow-up mailing with the same materials was sent two weeks later. Using these procedures, we received 543 completed questionnaires, a 39.8% response rate. The sampling error estimate (Pena & Henderson, 1986) of the third and fourth grade teachers is calculated to be 2.94% at the 95% confidence level. This means that the practices reported by the sample are considered to be a highly accurate reflection of the practices of all third and fourth grade teachers in the two states.

Survey Results

Teachers responded to demographic questions about themselves and their training experiences in gifted education. The majority of the teachers who returned the questionnaires were White (88%) and female (93.9%). The respondents had an average of 17.6 years teaching experience. Many of the teachers had advanced degrees. Teachers' highest degrees earned were: BA/BS (50.8%), MA/MS (45.9%), Ed.S. and Ph.D./Ed.D. (3.1%). The teachers who responded taught in rural (46.6%), suburban (33.5%), and urban (19.9%) districts. These percentages were representative of the proportions drawn by Market Data Retrieval for the sample of rural, suburban, and urban teachers in the two states.

Teachers reported their previous training experiences in gifted and talented education. The totals in each category were: degree in g/t (1.7%), college course(s) (33.0%), workshop(s) outside the district (29.8%), district inservice (53.4%), no training in g/t (26.2%), and no response to this question (1.3 %). (Note, the overall total does not equal 100% because teachers could select more than one option for this question.)

Teachers' responses to the items about the degree to which they use various practices with average performing and high ability/gifted students were compared. The means of the 6 factors representing their practices with average and high ability/gifted are depicted in Figure 1.

As shown in Figure 1, the differences in the means between the practices with average and high ability students on the six factors are very minor. In fact, inferential analyses revealed no meaningful differences on any of the factors. When examining the means for rural, suburban, and urban teachers separately, we still found no significant differences (i.e., the means of the factors for average and gifted

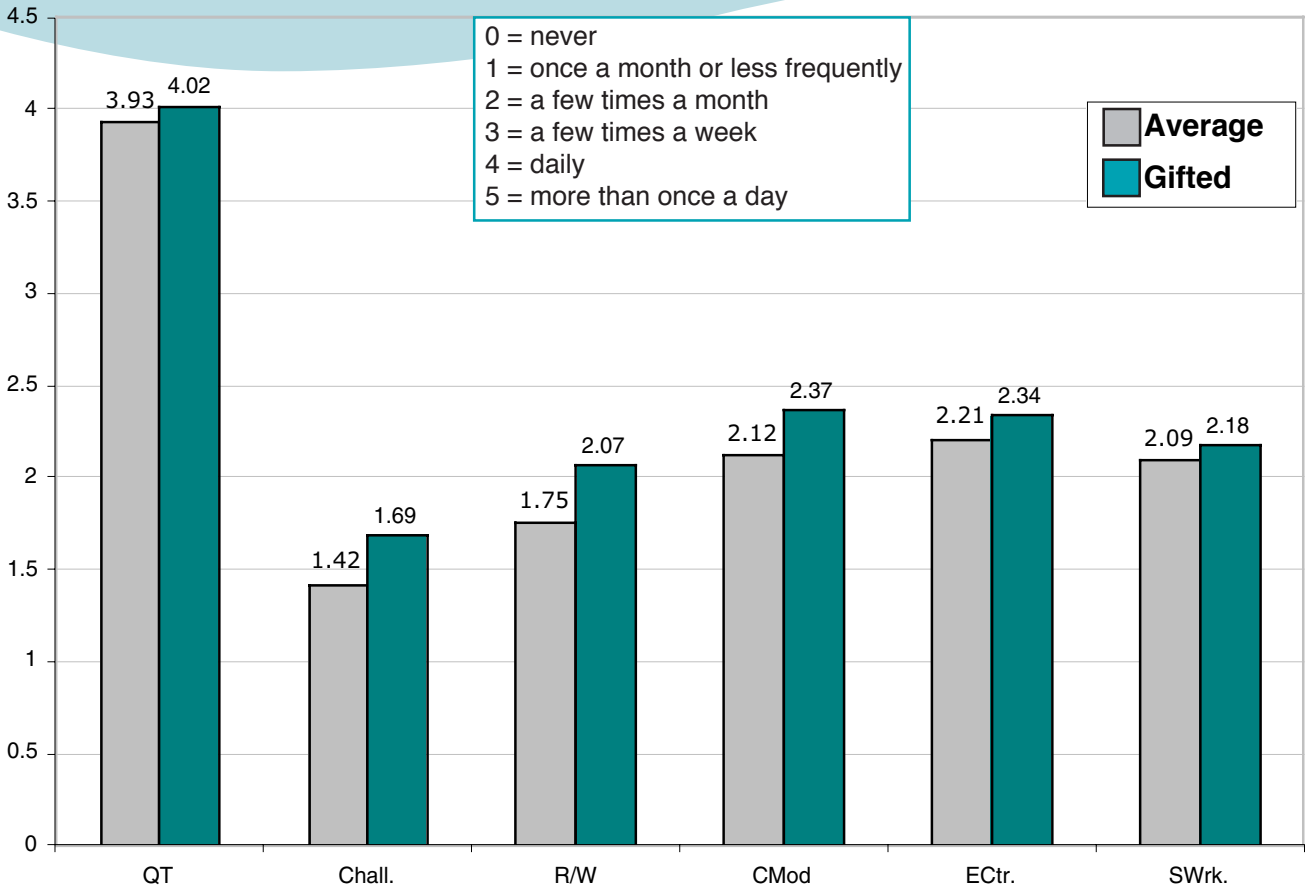

Figure 1. Factor means of classroom practices with average and gifted students (N = 543).

ratings were nearly identical on all three sub-samples). Regardless of the type of community in which teachers work, their self-reported practices are nearly the same with average and high ability students.

Several additional analyses were conducted to examine variables that may be associated with teachers' classroom practices. In general, we did not find a significant association between teachers' training experiences in gifted and talented education and their classroom practices. However, when comparing teachers who had taken gifted education coursework at a college or university (n = 179) versus teachers who had not taken gifted education coursework (n = 337), significant differences were found on one factor–curriculum modifications with gifted students ($p < .05$ with a Bonferroni adjustment). Teachers who had taken gifted education coursework provided curriculum modifications for their high ability/gifted students more frequently. Furthermore, when examining the factor scores of teachers who have formal degrees in gifted education (n = 9) versus those who did not (n□= 527), we found significantly higher means on three factors: challenges and choices with average students, challenges and choices with high ability/gifted students, and curriculum modifications with high ability/gifted students ($p < .05$ with a Bonferroni adjustment), which indicates that they provide accommodations more frequently in these areas. As in the study conducted 10 years ago, we found no significant association between teachers' years of teaching experience and classroom practices with average and high ability students. Complete details about all quantitative analyses from the data collected will be included in a forthcoming journal article.

Teachers were given the opportunity to add additional comments at the end of the survey, and approximately half of the respondents did so. These comments were collapsed into 10 categories. One

(continued on page 6)

(continued from page 5)

category was labeled "The GT Program alone meets the needs of high ability students" (n = 40 comments). The following quotes reflect these comments:

> We have a gifted and talented instructor who removes G/T students from the regular classroom for an entire afternoon one day/week. She is responsible for projects, programs, and lessons that reflect many of the items in this survey. (Teacher No. 349)

> We teach toward the state's 4th grade benchmark exam. I teach in a very disciplined manner as it has been successful in high test scores overall. "SEEK" students receive specific instructional time each week. (Teacher No. 587)

> We have general education classes with students from all ability groups. There is a FOCUS program for gifted/talented students. They work on higher level thinking skills there. (Teacher No. 1591)

Another category was labeled "Environmental factors that preclude providing differentiated practices" (n = 46 comments). The quotes below illustrate this category:

> We spend 1 1/2 hours in reading and math each day. These times were set for us by the administration. Also, in reading everyone uses the same level book, no matter what individual level they are on. (Teacher No. 635)

> Our scores on state mandated tests were so low, my schedule is "set in concrete." I have had to be very creative with grouping and assignments within my self-contained classroom. We are so pressured to raise scores we were told to forget science and social studies. (Teacher No. 351)

> I know how to provide for a gifted/higher ability child, but I fail to follow through with differentiation due to higher classroom demands; more to cover in the curriculum, more students, and lack of adequate planning time. (Teacher No. 1774)

> No money, no programs, no time, too much curriculum, too many tests, no room for creativity in teaching; dictated how to teach, what to teach, when to teach. (Teacher No. 1320)

Twenty-eight teachers did not provide any responses to indicate the frequency with which various practices were used with gifted students, i.e., they left this column blank on the survey. Therefore, a third category was labeled "Responses in the Average column only." One example reflects this category: "Students have not yet been identified as gifted in third grade. The G/T teacher comes in the classroom once a month and does an activity with the whole class" (Teacher No. 523). These teachers' comments suggest that they believe the gifted education program alone, if one exists in their school, meets high ability/gifted students' needs.

Conclusions

The major conclusion drawn from the replication study is that teachers' differentiation practices in third and fourth grade classrooms have not changed in the last 10 years. In fact, when overlaying Figure 1 from this article on a similar figure from 10 years ago, the two graphs are virtually identical. Teachers in the two states selected for this replication have more professional development experiences in gifted education than the teachers across the country reported 10 years ago, but this does not appear to be reflected in their classroom practices as reported on this survey.

Most of the questions, issues, and implications from these results are similar to those we reported for the national survey several years ago, but some new questions and issues are of concern today. For example, what is the impact of the standards from the various disciplines and state standards on teachers' classroom practices? Furthermore, how is statewide testing related to this issue? In an extensive quantitative and qualitative study conducted recently by the University of Virginia site of the NRC/GT, the impact of state testing initiatives on elementary classroom practices was investigated (Moon, Brighton, & Callahan, 2003). The researchers concluded: "Teachers reported similar instructional practices regardless of students' academic abilities," and "Regardless of the class ability level, teachers reported spending substantial time in preparation for state-mandated tests" (p. 52).

They found that high stakes testing appears to have a negative impact on the classroom practices provided to capable students.

Some of the teachers' comments on the survey indicated they, too, are experiencing strong pressure to raise students' test scores, which may explain why many do not make accommodations for capable students in classrooms. They may be concerned that if they eliminate previously mastered curriculum material for some students, their group achievement test scores will decrease. If this is a concern, the results of the NRC/GT Curriculum Compacting Study should be shared with these teachers (Reis et al., 1993). The findings from that study indicated no decrease in high ability students' achievement test scores when 40 to 50% of the curriculum was eliminated in at least one subject area.

The implications from the survey results for policy makers, educational leaders, and practitioners, which were articulated a decade ago, still apply today. Many teachers continue to believe that their gifted program, even if students receive direct services for only 1 hour per week, meets the needs of their high ability/gifted students. This suggests that continued, increased, or different professional development experiences are needed. Districts should be reminded that they probably have many new teachers who were not on staff when they had original training on various topics in gifted education. In addition, if the new understandings about strategies for meeting capable students' needs are to be implemented, teachers need more support and encouragement to apply the training. Many districts do not encourage or provide follow-up experiences for teachers after they have attended a gifted education workshop. Stephanie Hirsh, Deputy Executive Director of the National Staff Development Council, makes a forceful argument for doing this by stating: "Training without follow up is malpractice" (1997, p. 1).

To address this concern, professional development experts advocate "job embedded" professional development through the use of cadre groups (sometimes called "critical friends" groups), collaborative action research projects, and peer coaching in schools (Bambino, 2002; McAdamis, 2001). The results from this survey indicate that teachers with formal training in gifted education provide curriculum modifications for high ability/gifted students more frequently. This may be due to the fact that they apply the strategies in their classrooms when completing requirements for gifted education coursework. When attending a brief district inservice on a topic in gifted education, teachers are not held accountable for implementing a strategy or practice.

The results from the replication study are disheartening to advocates and educators who have been working tirelessly to provide appropriate academic services for bright students in regular classroom settings, settings where the majority of the high ability/gifted students spend the majority of their school day. However, it should be noted that the results from the survey indicate that some teachers do make accommodations for capable students and/or strive to improve their instructional practices. For example, one teacher wrote,

> Being a new teacher I have learned a lot and will change several things. I only have one [g/t program] student and I feel that he needs to have more independent assignments . . . allowing him to do independent study activities related to his interest. (Teacher No. 333)

And another said, "I need help differentiating. More planning time would help with being able to gather materials and think creatively how to best meet the varying needs in my classroom" (Teacher No. 1204). These quotes illustrate that some teachers want assistance to make instructional and curricular modifications for high ability students in their classrooms.

We must remind readers that this study was limited to third and fourth grade teachers' self-reported practices in two states. Generalizations to teachers in other states or at other grade levels are unwarranted. In addition, we want to emphasize that this was a survey about practices with high ability/gifted students in regular classroom settings and was not an investigation about practices in special settings, such as in resource rooms or full-time placements. Also, we want to make it clear that we are not advocating accommodations for high ability/gifted students in the regular classroom only; rather,

(continued on page 8)

(continued from page 7)

we believe that a continuum of special services for high ability students should be provided in school districts (Hertzog, 1998; Renzulli & Reis, 1997).

We urge parents, educators, and policy makers to view this study as an opportunity to create effective professional development experiences for teachers and to provide more resources to increase the services for high ability/gifted students. The current economic situation in our nation, the uncertainties about the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and the results of this research suggest that we have some great challenges ahead of us if we want schools to provide appropriate services for high ability children in regular classroom settings.

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The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented Senior Scholars Series

Joseph S. Renzulli &
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Storrs, CT

Over the years a large amount of theory, research, and practical strategies for identification and programming has accumulated in our field; and many of the field's senior scholars have integrated this material from their respective areas of interest into what becomes the "wisdom base" of gifted education. One of the goals of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented is to bring this accumulated wisdom to practitioners and other scholars in a format that is economical in terms of both readers' time and cost. The result has been publications prepared by our Center, in addition to the major research activities that have been carried out over the years at the University of Connecticut, Yale University, the University of Virginia, other collaborating institutions, and the several hundred schools that make up our Collaborative School District partnerships.

The most recent set of publications in this genre is entitled the Senior Scholars Series, and it focuses on bringing to the attention of practitioners, other researchers, and/or policymakers the thoughts and recommendations of persons who have dealt extensively with important topics in the field. The monographs are intended to reflect the mission statement of the Center, which reads, in part, to provide the field with products that are theory and research driven, problem-based and consumer-oriented.

The Senior Scholars Series is intended to "push forward" thinking in a way that will give direction to the field in the years ahead. The series takes into account the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Education Program, which gives highest priority to identifying and serving high potential students who may not be identified through traditional assessment criteria, including individuals of limited English proficiency, individuals with disabilities, and individuals from economically disadvantaged groups.

For this newsletter we are presenting Dr. James J. Gallagher's perspective on public policy and Dr. Joyce VanTassel-Baska's views on identifying and nurturing promising students. Their monographs on public policy and curriculum, respectively, are part of the Senior Scholar Series. Other current Senior Scholars monographs highlight the work of Dr. Nicholas Colangelo, Dr. Donald Treffinger, and Dr. Nancy Robinson. Information about the Senior Scholars Series can be found at www.gifted.uconn.edu. The abstracts and findings from the Center's publications are on our web site can be downloaded and reproduced without permission.

The Society's Role in Educating the Gifted: The Role of Public Policy

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Why write or read a book on educational policy and gifted children? What purpose does it serve? How does it get us closer to our goal of maximizing educational opportunities for gifted students? Many people have to be reminded that these policies often place boundary lines around the program and determine what is permissible and what is not in the education of such students.

What New Policies Are Needed for the Appropriate Education of Gifted Students?

Identification. Change existing standards and rules that do not reflect the multidimensional approach. There should be acceptance of different sets of eligibility standards for different programs (e.g., math, creative writing). (Administrative rules, professional initiatives)

Placement. Professional standards should make clear the importance of cultural diversity in programs for gifted students. Districts should explain why there is a lack of diversity in their programs. The Office of Civil Rights has sensitized local school

systems regarding the importance of diversity of participants in such programs. (Court decisions, administrative rules)

Differentiated Programming. Financial support from state or federal government sources should be made available to support curricular development at various age levels. There should be a recognition that without such support sophisticated curricular differentiation will not take place. (Legislation, professional initiatives)

Program Evaluation. There should be regulations at the state and local level calling for programs for gifted students to generate periodic reports on their results. Local district plans would be required to include measurable objectives and methods for evaluating the plan and the services offered. The test of such programs would be student performance on high level tasks. (Legislation, administrative rules)

Professional Support Systems. Support systems should be available for general education (e.g., Professional Preparation, Technical Assistance, Research, Program Evaluation, Comprehensive Planning). There should be explicit rules that include expertise in gifted education in all of these support elements. State budgets should include funds for preservice and inservice personnel preparation for teachers of gifted students. (Legislation, administrative rules, professional initiatives)

Where Do Policies Come From?

Public policy for gifted students, like policy for any group of students, comes from four main sources: *legislation, court decisions, administrative rules* (at local, state, or federal level), and *professional initiatives*.

Legislation. By far the largest amount of legislation concerning the education of gifted students is at the State level. This is largely true because the states traditionally are considered to have the major responsibility for education in this country. Practically every state has some language in their education legislation that deals with gifted students (Karnes, Troxclair, & Marquardt, 1997; Stephens & Karnes, 2000). In 22 states, gifted students are included in the broad category of exceptional children (Baker & Friedman-Nimz, 2000).

Court Decisions. Other major sources of policy statements, or clarifications, are court decisions. There seems to be a general assumption that there has not been major court activity in gifted education, but this is because the disputes have mainly been handled at the state level, and are not very visible nationwide (Karnes & Marquardt, 2000, Zirkel, 2003).

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has been drawn into various actions against school systems based upon the observed limited participation of children from minority groups in programs for gifted students (Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994). More than half the findings made by OCR were in favor of the local schools when the charge was discrimination against minority students and families.

Administrative Rules. Another major source of policy statements are the administrative rules established by local schools or by state departments of education. For example, a rule that states that no child can enter kindergarten prior to his/her fifth birthday. Such a rule would interfere with the early admission to school of a 4-year old gifted student who had clearly shown the intellectual capabilities and social maturity of a much older child. Rules about identification or placement in school programs for gifted students can be a source of difficult relationships between parents and schools.

Professional Initiatives. These include setting professional standards, conducting research, designing curriculum, conducting evaluations, etc. One example of an NAGC policy statement is on inclusion:

> NAGC maintains that gifted students, like other children with special needs, require a full *continuum of educational services* to aid in the development of the students' unique strengths and talents. One such option in that continuum of services of gifted students can be the regular classroom (inclusion). In such an inclusive setting there should be well-prepared teachers who understand, and can program for, these gifted students, and sufficient administrative support necessary to help differentiate the program to their special needs. (Landrum, Callahan, & Shaklee, 1999)

(continued on page 12)

(continued from page 11)

What is Social Policy?

So what is this social policy that is so important to parents and educators? The definition of social policy is as follows:

Social policy creates the rules and standards by which scarce resources are allocated to meet almost unlimited social needs. (Gallagher, 1994, p. 337).

An effective social policy should answer the following questions:

1. **Who receives the resources?** The first question deals with the issue of eligibility. Which children will be identified as gifted students and become eligible for available special educational services? This will determine who will receive needed differential services.
2. **Who delivers the resources?** The second question in the definition concerns teacher qualification. Who has the credentials necessary to provide a special educational experience for gifted students? Should they have sophistication in content such as mathematics or should they be experts in using instructional strategies such as problem-based learning, or both?
3. **What are the resources to be delivered?** The third question deals with the special resources that would be provided. Would you provide for this student an advanced mathematics program, special computer lessons, or an advanced creative arts curriculum?
4. **What are the conditions under which the resources are delivered?** The fourth question describes the limits or parameters to the resource delivery. Can the resources be delivered in homogenous or heterogeneous settings, in a special class or a special school, or a Charter School? Could these resources be delivered at home?

Taken together, the answers to these four questions should provide a portrait of who the gifted students are, who their teachers are, what the nature of their special programs are, and where their programs are being carried out.

Two Families

Let us see how such a definition can affect two gifted students and their families. Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins are concerned about their child, Julie, who has shown superior educational aptitude since she was very young. The policies in their school district will determine whether she is identified as gifted, what the qualifications of her teachers will be, and the kind of program in which she will be enrolled. The Jenkins are now faced with a series of decisions. Should Julie join a special class, enroll in an accelerated mathematics program, think about taking Advanced Placement courses, be moved ahead a grade? Above all, Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins and Julie must ask who made all of these rules and regulations that govern all of the activities, where did these rules comes from, and what justification do they have as applied to Julie's needs?

Mr. and Mrs. Alvarez have a different problem. They know their son, Juan, is a bright boy who learns quickly, and is bored by the slow pace of lessons. They worry about whether he will qualify for all of the special opportunities that might be given to Julie. Since English is a second language to Juan, will he be able to do well on the tests that seem to determine admittance to these opportunities? The Alvarez family, too, wonders who made the rules, and for what purpose?

The truth is that, in many cases, these rules or policies were constructed some time ago, and the existing staff might not even know where they came from or the assumptions upon which they were based. Yet these policies will shape a great deal of what happens to Julie and Juan, so it is important to understand why and how they were constructed and whether they should be continued or changed.

What New Policies Are Needed for the Appropriate Education of Gifted Students?

Identification

There are general agreements in the professional community that we should abandon the single dimension of eligibility such as IQ test score, and adopt a multidimensional approach.

Policy. This would mean changing any existing standards that didn't reflect the multidimensional approach, and the specification of just what the dimensions are that should be included, and how they

would be combined. Also there would be acceptance of a different set of eligibility standards for different programs, such as accelerated mathematics as opposed to creative writing. These changes would likely appear in Administrative Rules and Regulations, and some consensus on this language could be pushed by organizations such as Council for Exceptional Children, The Association for the Gifted or National Association for Gifted Children.

Placement

Policy. It should be made clear through various professional standards that there is the expectation for a diversity of participation in these special programs that local schools would likely be asked to explain why there isn't cultural diversity if such turns out to be the case. The Office of Civil Rights has sensitized local school systems to set up rules of their own about diversity of participation in special programs.

Differentiated Programming

Policy. There is a clear need for a much-increased level of support for the development of differentiated curricula at various age levels. This would mean either substantially increasing the funding for the Javits program and/or greater support for state initiatives in this direction, either by states themselves, or through the federal government providing funds that would allow the states to take such initiatives.

Program Evaluation

Policy. At the state and local level there should be specific expectations that the programs for gifted students generate periodic reports on their results. This would mean that plans would include measurable objectives and a method to evaluate the plan and services offered, and that such evaluation shall focus on improved student performance on high level tasks.

Professional Support Systems

Policy. When there are support systems put into place for general education (e.g., personnel preparation, regional service centers, data systems), there should be explicit expertise in these support system elements devoted to gifted education. We know that the needs of gifted students are often overlooked in such systems (gifted is a "cool" problem) and must be mandated if it is to happen. Thus there should be provisions in the state education budget for funds for preservice and inservice personnel preparation for specialists in gifted education and a visible presence in communications and data systems for gifted education.

Support systems should be available for all of general education. This special plea to pay attention to gifted education is not meant to suggest that these support elements should be available exclusively for gifted students, but merely to ask that the special needs of gifted students should be specifically included along with that of general education.

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(continued on page 14)

(continued from page 13)

Critical Issues in the Identification and Nurturance of Promising Students from Low Income Backgrounds

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There is little disagreement in the field of gifted education about the need to have a broader diversity of students in programs for the gifted, especially those representative of low socio-economic backgrounds and minority students. However, our track record has been less than sterling. In a 30-year history of emphasis on this as a major issue in the field, dating back to the first national conference on "disadvantaged gifted" in 1975 in Atlanta, we have espoused more rhetoric and less action than on many other issues. Why is this one so intractable? For the sake of argument, I submit the following ideas for consideration:

1. We have not developed strong identification systems that are flexible and dynamic enough to ensure the use of nontraditional measures routinely in the service of improving our "hit" rate for identifying these students. Moreover, the selection approaches we have employed are also flawed in respect to making school-based individual decisions about the optimal matches of students to program that would allow us to examine profile data rather than group data. Decision-making is still done with an eye to expediency rather than reflection on the merits of individual children, with an eye to finding "well-rounded" students rather than those with "peaks."
2. As a field we have been unable to afford individual psychological assessments carried out by qualified personnel. Instead, we are often patching together tools for identification that have no validity or reliability data such as performance-based tasks selected out of workbooks and handmade teacher checklists. Portfolio assessment as an identification tool has limited and questionable application for school districts to implement because of a lack of equitable processes used across the student population in the development of such products.
3. We often refuse to acknowledge the importance of traditional standardized tests as a part of the process for finding such students, often preferring to concentrate on finding the right alternative test rather than finding new ways to combine the use of both types of measures.
4. We refuse to address this problem intensively at the program level, which means we do not create fulltime self-contained classes for these learners where they have a comprehensive and integrated learning experience from kindergarten on. Studies of significant growth by these populations suggest that more, not less, grouping is facilitative of their overall cognitive and affective development.
5. We have not learned from urban models of working with critical masses of these students over the past 20 years with respect to programming options that work and successful curriculum and instructional interventions at the classroom level, all of which require multiple years to show success and significant progress. In these settings, low income students are in the majority (albeit not at the same representational level as in the school-wide population). Places like Chicago and San Diego have deep insights to offer us as a field if we would pay attention about what works and what doesn't.
6. We have not focused sufficiently on these students' strength areas in respect to program intervention, especially as it relates to accelerated learning in key domains. Appropriate doses of content acceleration also have a positive effect on self-esteem, genuinely earned through high level performance in a given area.
7. We have not sufficiently recognized and cherished individual differences within the gifted population. While we have emerged as a field based on the individual differences literature, our programs and services that are labeled "gifted" are too frequently one size

fits all. Accommodating differences in rate of learning, domain of aptitude, cognitive style differences, and multicultural backgrounds should be the model of excellence we are displaying to the rest of education within our pull-out and self-contained programs. Too rarely is this the case, making it difficult to serve underrepresented populations well.

8. We have not taken seriously the need to provide programs that match students' level and domain of aptitude. For many students from low income backgrounds, the lack of bridging experiences that give them a headstart or allow them to catch up to more traditional gifted students are not routinely provided. These are especially crucial at the transition points of schooling for these learners—early childhood, middle school, high school, and college. While models are available for such programs, they are available only in isolated locations rather than seen as a routine part of a value-added education for these students.
9. Teaching in gifted classrooms has not routinely built on the "creative positives" so well-articulated by Torrance and others in work with these learners. Using analogical reasoning, oral and expressive activities, collaborative learning groups, and open-ended tasks that stress creative thinking should characterize our classroom-based work with these special populations.
10. While we understand the importance of social support mechanisms for these students, based on over 20 years of research suggesting that personalizing the educational process through ongoing relationships with tutors, mentors, and teachers matters, we do not have the resources to mount specific value-added services to our programs for these learners. Thus, we fail to provide the counseling glue that is needed to keep them in gifted programs even when they are identified, to counsel them into advanced courses at secondary level, and to prepare them and their families for the reality of college preparation, application, and acceptance.
11. We have not routinely engaged learners in assessing their own abilities, aptitudes, interests, and values. Consequently, our most at-risk young people many times lack an appreciation for who they are and how they might fit or develop a niche in the larger society. This problem is but one of many that highlights our lack of resources to address the social-emotional development of gifted learners, regardless of background.
12. Underachievement problems are common in low income learners for a variety of reasons. Just as we know that programming for these students cannot be done using the same interventions that we use with achieving gifted students, so we should be cognizant of the dual problems of low economic status and underachievement when we design program options.
13. Parent communication, involvement, and education about the "accrual of educational advantage" has not been a routine part of our parent development agenda. Consequently, the needed home-school collaborative relationships have not been activated with these families.
14. We have not disseminated our success stories with these students. Many of the successful programs have been written up, but are part of a fugitive literature, buried in research and evaluation offices at local, state, and federal levels instead of in our journals and magazines informing the educational and lay community.

Potential Solutions

- Create a strong local and state gifted program infrastructure that can provide the cohesive services needed by underrepresented groups.
- Create collaborative relationships and structures with other agencies and departments whose major mission is to serve these groups.
- Create more models of excellence in meeting these students' needs collectively and individually.

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