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Students who are gifted and talented are found in full-time self-contained classrooms, magnet schools, pull-out programs, resource rooms, regular classrooms, and every combination of these settings. No matter where they obtain their education, they need an appropriately differentiated curriculum designed to address their individual characteristics, needs, abilities, and interests.

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM

An effective curriculum for students who are gifted is essentially a basic curriculum that has been modified to meet their needs. The unique characteristics of the students must serve as the basis for decisions on how the curriculum should be modified (Feldhusen, Hansen, & Kennedy, 1989; Maker 1982; TAG, 1989; VanTassel-Baska et al., 1988).
It is difficult to generalize about students who are gifted because their characteristics and needs are so personal and unique. However, as a group they comprehend complex ideas quickly, learn more rapidly and in greater depth than their age peers, and may exhibit interests that differ from those of their peers. They need time for in-depth exploration, they manipulate ideas and draw generalizations about seemingly unconnected concepts, and they ask provocative questions.

A program that builds on these characteristics may be viewed as qualitatively (rather than quantitatively) different from the basic curriculum; it results from appropriate modification of content, process, environment, and product (Maker, 1982).

MODIFYING CONTENTContent consists of ideas, concepts, descriptive information, and facts. Content, as well as learning experiences, can be modified through acceleration, compacting, variety, reorganization, flexible pacing, and the use of more advanced or complex concepts, abstractions, and materials. When possible, students should be encouraged to move through content areas at their own pace. If they master a particular unit, they need to be provided with more advanced learning activities, not more of the same activity. Their learning characteristics are best served by thematic, broad-based, and integrative content, rather than just single-subject areas. An entire content area arranged and structured around a conceptual framework can be mastered in much less time than is traditionally allotted (VanTassel-Baska, 1989). In addition, such concept-based instruction expands opportunities to generalize and to integrate and apply ideas. (See Bruner, 1966, MAN: A COURSE OF STUDY [MACOS] for an example of a thematic, integrated curriculum.)

Middle and secondary schools are generally organized to meet student needs within content areas. Providing an interdisciplinary approach is another way of modifying

curriculum . Jacobs and Borland (1986) found that gifted students benefit greatly from curriculum experiences that cross or go beyond traditional content areas, particularly when they are encouraged to acquire an integrated understanding of knowledge and the structure of the disciplines.

MODIFYING PROCESSTo modify process, activities must be restructured to be more intellectually demanding. For example, students need to be challenged by questions that require a higher level of response or by open-ended questions that stimulate inquiry, active exploration, and discovery. Although instructional strategies depend on the age of the students and the nature of the disciplines involved, the goal is always to encourage students to think about subjects in more abstract and complex ways. Activity selection should be based on student interests, and activities should be used in ways that encourage self-directed learning. Bloom's TAXONOMY OF EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES (1956) offers the most common approach to process modification. His classification system moves from more basic levels of thought, such as memory or recall, to more complex levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Parnes (1966), Taba (1962), and others have provided additional models for structuring thinking skills. Every teacher should know a variety of ways to stimulate and encourage higher level thinking skills. Group interaction and simulations, flexible pacing, and guided self-management are a few of the methods for managing class activities that support process modification.

MODIFYING ENVIRONMENTGifted students learn best in a receptive, nonjudgmental, student-centered environment that encourages inquiry and independence, includes a wide variety of materials, provides some physical movement, is generally complex, and connects the school experience with the greater world. Although all students might appreciate such an environment, for students who are gifted it is essential that the teacher establish a climate that encourages them to question, exercise independence, and use their creativity in order to be all that they can be.

MODIFYING PRODUCT EXPECTATION AND STUDENT RESPONSETeachers can encourage students to demonstrate what they have learned in a wide variety of forms that reflect both knowledge and the ability to manipulate ideas. For example, instead of giving a written or oral book report, students might prefer to design a game around the theme and characters of a book. Products can be consistent with each student's

preferred learning style. They should address real problems, concerns, and audiences; synthesize rather than summarize information; and include a self-evaluation process.

ASSESSING CURRICULUM EFFECTIVENESS

In their synthesis of curriculum effectiveness studies and effective practice, VanTassel-Baska et al. (1988) suggested that differentiated curriculum would respond to diverse characteristics of gifted learners in the following three ways:

* By accelerating the mastery of basic skills through testing-out procedures and reorganization of the curriculum according to higher level skills and concepts.

* By engaging students in active problem-finding and problem-solving activities and research.

* By providing students opportunities for making connections within and across systems of knowledge by focusing on issues, themes, and ideas.

Curriculum development is a dynamic, ongoing process. Special attention needs to be paid to articulation, scope, and sequence to avoid gaps and repetition through grade levels; ensure that the understandings and skills we expect children to develop fit together; and assure that children are provided with the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for the future. Periodic evaluations of curriculum effectiveness allow corrections to be made when needed, and they are essential if curriculum is to meet the long-term needs of gifted students for increasingly complex and challenging opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The curriculum committee of the Leadership Training Institute (Passow, 1982) developed seven guiding principles for curriculum differentiation that reflect the considerations described in this Digest.

1. The content of curricula for gifted students should focus on and be organized to include more elaborate, complex, and in-depth study of major ideas, problems, and themes that integrate knowledge within and across systems of thought.

2. Curricula for gifted students should allow for the development and application of productive thinking skills to enable students to reconceptualize existing knowledge and/or generate new knowledge.

3. Curricula for gifted students should enable them to explore constantly changing knowledge and information and develop the attitude that knowledge is worth pursuing in an open world.

4. Curricula for gifted students should encourage exposure to, selection, and use of appropriate and specialized resources.

5. Curricula for gifted students should promote self-initiated and self-directed learning and growth.

6. Curricula for gifted students should provide for the development of self-understanding and the understanding of one's relationship to persons, societal institutions, nature, and culture.

7. Evaluations of curricula for gifted students should be conducted in accordance with the previously stated principles, stressing higher level thinking skills, creativity, and excellence in performance and products.

Developing curriculum that is sufficiently rigorous, challenging, and coherent for students who are gifted is a challenging task. The result, however, is well worth the effort. Appropriately differentiated curriculum produces well-educated, knowledgeable students who have had to work very hard, have mastered a substantial body of knowledge, and can think clearly and critically about that knowledge. Achieving such results for one or for a classroom full of students who are gifted will produce high levels of satisfaction, not only for the students who are beneficiaries, but also for every teacher who is willing to undertake the task.

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