

Curriculum Consequences: If You Learn This, Then . . .

Gifted students sometimes have been the recipients of a differentiated curriculum that is responsive to their needs, interests, and abilities without the concomitant understandings of the ramifications of learning that same curriculum. Attaining the significant ends of a defined curriculum without simultaneously recognizing that the practice of what has been mastered can result in both negative, as well as positive, consequences has created some intellectually dangerous situations for the gifted.

Scenario: Carlos is sitting with his classmates in the lunch area munching on his sandwich when Tom shares his ideas about the latest information on the Mars robots. Carlos responds by asking his friend if he can prove with evidence that what he is saying is true. Tom says that Carlos always challenges him and makes him feel “bad.” Carlos is practicing the critical thinking skills he learned and does not understand how one of the skills he mastered and received kudos for learning in a classroom setting is now a source of contention between friends outside of the classroom.

Scenario: Maggie and her family are discussing the movie they just saw as they are leaving the theater. Dad asks his daughter what she thought of the movie. “It is a great example of the idea that change is inevitable and that one change leads to another,” she says. “We do not need a lesson right now. Who wants ice cream?” her father asks.

Scenario: Tamara was working with the family to create a scrapbook for a relative. She made a variety of suggestions to complete the project. She told the group how they could redesign an aspect of the task

and substitute one material for another. “Why do you want to change the directions? You always want to try to do something in a different way,” remarked her cousin.

Scenario: Paul is with his mother at the information kiosk at the bookstore. He has selected a book with his birthday money and is engaged in asking the salesperson questions about the book prior to purchasing it. His mother smiles politely and tells her son that it is time to leave the store. As they walk to the register, she admonishes her son for asking so many questions and being so critical about the book he has yet to buy or read.

These scenarios clearly exemplify the issue of “curriculum consequences.” Teaching gifted students the skills and content of a curriculum without helping them realize that the application or practice of the very things they learned in another context could have residual effects that place them in peril in a new or different situation. One way to resolve this issue is to incorporate the concept of learning the consequences of skills and content as an important feature of a differentiated curriculum.

- To learn application of the skills of critical thinking as an important tool of reasoning across the disciplines *and* to also learn, in tandem, the potential reactions of people to critical thinking.
- To learn the big ideas defined as theories, principles, and generalizations within different domains of knowledge *and* to also learn the quizzical responses of people when these ideas are espoused. This is crucial to give value

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and credibility to both studying these big ideas and protecting their importance for the person who is sharing them.

- To learn that offering creative alternatives to a proposed plan of action *and* to simultaneously explain to students that creative thinking can intimidate, as well as ingratiate, an individual or group.
- To learn the art of questioning *and* to also recognize the quizzical responses of others to both the skills of inquiry and the inquirer is paramount to ensure that questioning is supported and practiced as a skill set.
- To stress the importance of becoming an independent thinker *and* to also reinforce that the effects of becoming independent can place the learner in jeopardy.

A curriculum advocate is one who understands how to design a differen-

tiated curriculum that is inclusive of these features:

1. *Explicit or defined explanation of the objective or reason why a skill or content area is to be learned.* The retrospective discussions with gifted students about their curricular experiences are replete with examples of the assumption made by educators that students would understand implicitly the value of the curriculum being taught to them. The students' misunderstandings about "the why" underlying curriculum experiences often diminishes its intent.
2. *Descriptions of the purposes of learning the specific skills or content areas as they relate to the past, present, and future in both school and real-world settings.* Too often it is assumed that the value teachers hold for the curriculum is commensurate to the value students

should and will assign to that same curriculum.

3. *Multiple opportunities to practice the skill or content areas in intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts.* The need to be able to transfer and generalize various curriculum experiences cannot be overlooked. Often teachers believe that gifted students need less practice and reinforcement than actually is required for any learner to attain mastery; "underteaching" a skill or content area can be the main contributor of underachievement.
4. *Discussions about the curriculum consequences derived from applying and practicing a skill set or content areas.* A differentiated curriculum should allow students to acquire understanding of the historic and contemporary consequences to individuals and societies when applying skills or content. This aspect of the curriculum is an opportunity to provide students with an introduction to the philosophical, psychological, and sociological ramifications of the curriculum. It allows students to develop "curricular sophistication" and to develop the curricular defense mechanisms that enable them to practice what they have learned with efficacy.

The advocacy efforts for a differentiated curriculum for gifted students have been recognized and have had substantive results. There is a need to develop advocacy efforts to safeguard the consequences that emerge when gifted students apply what they have learned from a differentiated curriculum. **GCT**