The Phenomenon of Waiting in Class

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Gifted children often complain about waiting in class to learn. A qualitative study of 16 children in elementary and middle school in grades 1–8 revealed that sitting and waiting was a universal ingredient of being gifted in those regular classrooms. Children experienced 3 kinds of waiting: school/classroom, instructional, and assignment. Grounded theory uncovered the variations in context producing waiting and the actions children use when encountering each type. Waiting is neither necessarily boring nor does it exist for every gifted child. Gifted children's voices illustrate how they experience life in the classroom. Implications of the findings for rethinking teaching, teacher evaluation, and classroom management are discussed.

Children spend many hours in classrooms. This study examines the experience of students in American schools who are gifted. We examine one aspect of the classroom experience: waiting in class for learning to occur. Interest in this topic stems from a recurrent question asked by students in a pull-out program for gifted children: "Ms. Peine, why do we have to sit and wait for other children?" The purpose of this paper is to report an exploration of this question from the perspective of the students. A description of how children interpret those aspects of classroom life is the outcome of this study. The children's voices tell educators much of what it is like to be gifted in the general education classroom.

Sitting and waiting in class is not a phenomenon unique to the gifted. Children's waiting in class is ordinary (Cullingford, 1991). It is by studying the underresearched ordinary part of life

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that we can capture the experience of being gifted in classrooms (Coleman, 1997). Among any group of students doing the same lesson, a few will learn faster and finish, several will not finish, and others take the amount of time the teacher intended. The number waiting will vary daily and by subject. Waiting also occurs in classes before and after actual teaching. All students experience these moments, but the child who is gifted may experience it differently. Although we have no direct data to that effect, other facts support the notion that gifted children must often be waiting. The range of achievement in a typical grade is more than 5 years (Gagné, 2005). If a teacher is teaching to the median (and we are not arguing for that), many students are unlikely to be at their instructional level. Gifted children arrive in class at the beginning of the school year knowing 40%–60% of the content (Coleman & Cross, 2005). So, it sounds reasonable that children who are gifted would experience recurrent periods of waiting. Many questions are raised by this fact. This study investigates how children who are gifted experience the waiting. How would they describe it? Is there a difference associated with grade or ages? How much does the context of subject matter affect the experience? These were the research questions.

Methodology

The research questions require a methodology that enables scholars to understand waiting from the perspective of students. Procedures should be implemented that place the voice of the students before that of the researcher. A form of qualitative inquiry, grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), is appropriate because it provides a means to produce a substantive theory of an underresearched phenomenon, namely, sitting and waiting in the regular classroom (Peine, 2003).

Participants

The sampling strategy was purposive. The objectives of the sampling procedure were (a) "to increase the scope or range of the

data"; (b) "to increase the likelihood that a full array of multiple realities will be uncovered"; and (c) "to maximize the investigator's ability to develop grounded theory" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40). Basically, the procedure selects a sample that can provide insight into the topic.

Two characteristics of students influenced their selection: age and gender. Breadth (grades 1–8) rather than depth (a single grade) was desired in order to see the developmental or cross-sectional properties of sitting and waiting. Gender was the second characteristic because gifted boys and girls bring different information and skills to learning activities, especially group discussion.

Deviating from the procedures recommended for building grounded theory, the size of the sample was determined before the study. Gifted children in grades 1–8 were chosen to design a narrative of the continuity of sitting and waiting. Sixteen students, one boy and one girl in grades 1–8, were selected randomly from a special education caseload of intellectually gifted students who attended regular classes in an elementary and middle school in one school system in a Southern state.

Data Sources

Semistructured interviews of students, field notes in classrooms, informal conversations with teachers and administrators, and maps of time drawn by students were sources of data. Each provided a different vantage point for understanding the phenomenon.

Interviews. An interview guide was developed and an initial question was written on a 4" X 6" index card for students to read. The prompt was, "Ms. Peine, why do we have to sit and wait in the regular classroom for other kids to learn stuff?" The interviews began with a general prompt, "Tell me about your typical day at school," and concluded with a specific question, "Can you tell me about a time during the day when it seems okay to wait?" At the conclusion of each interview, students were asked to reread the initial question and encouraged to add anything they had not covered adequately. The interviews averaged 30 minutes for young

children and 45 minutes for older students. All interviews were tape recorded in a quiet private room in the school.

The interview guide had four prompts:

- Tell me about your typical day in school.
- Over the year some of my students have come to me with this question: "Ms. Peine, why do we have to sit and wait in the regular classroom for other kids to learn stuff?"
  - o Probes: What does this mean to you? Have you had this experience? How do you handle this situation? What might I see you do while you are sitting and waiting? Would anything be happening that I would not be able to see?
- Do some parts of your day seem to go slower than other parts?
- Can you tell me about a time during the day when it seems okay to wait?

Field notes and informal conversations. Running notes were taken of all observations. Informal discussions with teachers and administrators were added later on the day they happened. Student schedules and handouts were included in field notes. The field notes were used to gain an understanding of the here-and-now of the students' experiences. Observations occurred in subject matter areas mentioned in the interviews for 30–45 minutes in elementary classrooms and for a full class period in middle school.

Student maps. Using the idea that children's drawings reveal how they conceptualize the world and are "signs of the way that children interpret their environment" (Krampen, 1991, p. 6), maps provided an alternate way to gather rich data to triangulate students' viewpoints. The maps were produced with the prompt: "Draw a map that shows me your typical school day." Students were instructed to include a key, detailing aspects of their maps. A typical map showed the sequence of their day and the time devoted to the segments and their commentary on that piece. Field notes were made of student comments and thinking aloud.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed to produce a grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The procedures produce open, axial, and selective coding of the data sources. Open coding is the first step and is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). Various chunks of the data are broken away from the total amount of data and given names such as *quick learning*, *lining up*, *new concept introduction*, *student inattention*, *teacher gone*, and so forth. Next, the names are studied to reassemble them into concepts that have common characteristics and associations. All concepts have properties and dimensions and finding them is accomplished by asking questions of the categories. Similar concepts have common characteristics that are properties.

Axial coding puts the data back together in new ways: showing connections between categories, verifying relationships against the data, and further examination of the data. The goal is to produce a paradigm model, which is a schema that links components as follows: *causal conditions->phenomenon->context->intervening conditions->action/interaction strategies->consequences*. Three models are presented in the analysis section.

The final step is selective coding, which produces a core category around which the storyline of the research is developed and the grounded theory is formulated.

Analysis and Findings

Analysis began with reading and rereading the data. Instead of a line-by-line analysis, paragraphs were the basis for the naming/labeling process. The interviews were read separately from other sources. The process yielded 20–25 conceptual ideas per interview. These lists were combined and reduced to produce 14 axial categories around three broad themes, which later in the analysis became paradigm models. *Classroom waiting* refers to particular school rules or classroom practices that students mentioned that caused them to wait. *Instructional waiting* is when new concepts

Table 1

Themes and Supporting Categories

School/Classroom Structure Waiting
- Teacher gone
- Lining up
- Teaching model
- Methods
- Setting change

Instructional Waiting
- New concept introduction
  - Prior knowledge
  - Repetitious instruction
- Concept review
  - Obvious questions
  - Student inattention
  - Methods

Assignment Waiting
- Work quicker
- Organization of work
- Groups

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are introduced or concepts are reviewed. *Assignment waiting* is that portion of the instructional period that is for seatwork, workbooks, or homework.

The schema for these themes and the names of the supporting categories are presented in Table 1. Each of these categories, such as work quicker or prior knowledge, was also analyzed further in terms of properties that seem to characterize them across the various classes: grade level, type of class, pace, activity, type of work, boring, observable, gender, and subject area. The properties enable the researcher to have a more comprehensive view of the categories and connection to the larger data set.

Axial coding yields paradigm models describing the relationships in the data. The three themes (structure, instruction, and assignment with their subcategories) are the bedrock of paradigm models. Sitting and waiting is described around each model. Each description reveals how the data created the model. A figure is supplied for each. Italics are used to highlight the components of the models as described earlier.

Classroom Structure Waiting

Classroom structure waiting (see Figure 1) is a *phenomenon* that is connected to the organization of the classroom. It is associated with *causal conditions* rooted in the classroom. The nature of the classroom constrains behavior. Classrooms have common qualities, such as rules or arrangement of student desks, that are interpreted by students differently. "She has us line up according to what we are going to buy in the lunch room. Since I just get milk, I am one of the first ones in line. I'm also one of the first ones to eat. So, I have lots of time to wait at lunch while other kids are going through the line" (third grade). "A scientist doesn't solve problems alone, so when the teacher puts us in groups to work, it's like the real world and ideas are just shooting out" (eighth grade).

The purpose of rules is to manage student behavior, physical movement of students, students' progression through the curriculum or lesson, and allocation of time. Rules may be written down or tacitly understood. For example, students in most classrooms are "expected to be in their seats when the bell rings," or "ask permission to leave your seat." Yet, in some classrooms students can talk quietly with friends when they have finished, and they do not have to ask permission to leave their seats. This kind of variation was seen across the classrooms.

A second *causal condition* of classroom structure waiting is the instructional model used by the teacher. At both schools, the teachers used a model composed of four parts, which frames teacher evaluation in the school system. The first part is the introduction of the lesson. The second part has consecutive phases: the "I do one" phase, in which the teacher models the learning, and the "I do one, you do it with me" phase, in which the teacher works an example and the students work along with her. The third phase is the "You do one, I'll do it with you," in which the student produces the example and the teacher assists. The final phase is "You do one" independently. After the fourth phase the teacher assigns practice work. The instructional model has a core assumption: All students learn at the same pace. At no point does the teacher assess students' prior understanding. The fourth phase produces these often-heard responses from students, "I want the
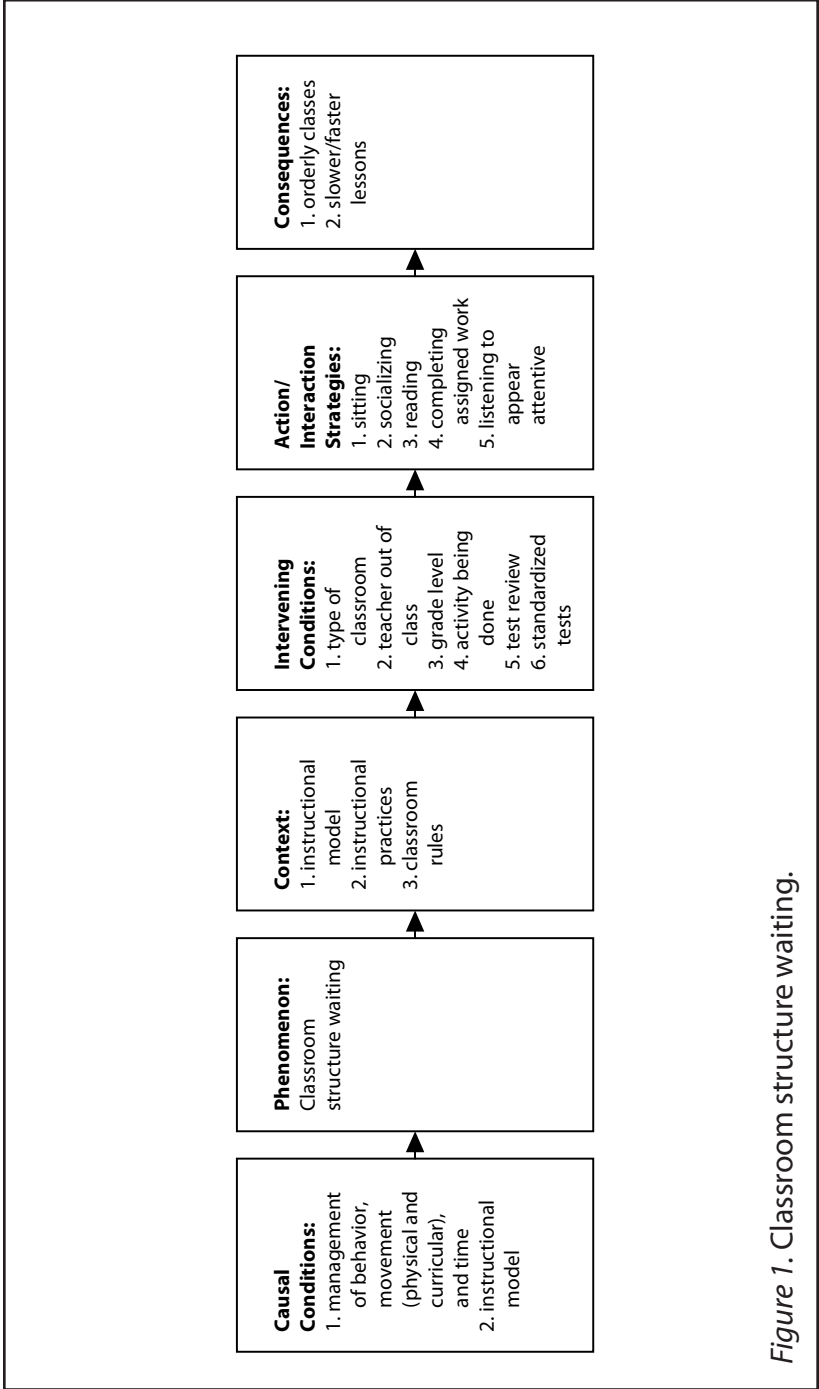
Causal Conditions:
1. management of behavior, movement (physical and curricular), and time
2. instructional model

Phenomenon: Classroom structure waiting

Context:
1. instructional model
2. instructional practices
3. classroom rules

Intervening Conditions:
1. type of classroom
2. teacher out of class
3. grade level
4. activity being done
5. test review
6. standardized tests

Action/ Interaction Strategies:
1. sitting
2. socializing
3. reading
4. completing assigned work
5. listening to appear attentive

Consequences:
1. orderly classes
2. slower/faster lessons

Figure 1. Classroom structure waiting.

teacher to get done so we can go on," or "Give us our homework, so we can work on it while you explain it." One side effect of using the model is that students are expected to be on the same page. On two occasions, students were reprimanded for "working ahead." If they hadn't been working ahead, they would have been waiting.

Several *intervening conditions* influence *action/interaction strategies*. In interviews, students often mentioned an intervening condition, then described what they might be doing (an action strategy). In order to maintain the integrity of the student comments and the flow of narrative, the two components of the paradigm model are reported together. For example, students at nearly all grade levels mentioned waiting when the teacher was called out of the room. They were concerned when they were left with no assignment. Carl, a fifth grader, said, "Like they're just getting ready to assign something, and they're called out for a phone call. Maybe, they don't get back for 5 minutes or more. Then you just have to sit there, wait, see what you had to do, and you couldn't do nothing. So you just have to sit there and that seems like a long time." Eighth grader Cathy said, "It's okay to wait when the teacher's not in the room, and they're stuck in a meeting somewhere because we can just talk." The teacher being out is the intervening condition. The action/interaction strategies are sitting and waiting or socializing.

The type of classroom is another *intervening condition*. In the middle school, students were placed according to achievement level in math and traveled with that group. In grades 3 and 5, students were grouped by achievement in math and reading and heterogeneously for other subjects. Kirsti, a fifth grader, described it: "Some classes are sort of mixed with some people who aren't as smart, some people who are average, and some who are in the gifted class. The people in the gifted class usually have to wait on some of the other people." In grades 1, 2, and 4, the classes were self-contained and heterogeneously grouped. Observation showed some children engaged and some waiting. Under assignment waiting, this situation is clarified.

Test review, an *intervening condition*, was problematic. Students talked about teachers using reviews of already graded

tests as an instructional tool by going over each item. Students who scored well were often impatient with this technique.

Practice sessions for the mandated state tests were mentioned by upper grade students as a time of waiting. A technique that might be appropriate for some students is not so for all. Cathy, an eighth grader, noted, "I passed all of the things the first day, so I had to sit there for the next three days [in that class] and find something to do." Carl, a fifth grader, said, "Well, I'm pretty good at math; I finish the tests early. One day I forgot my book so I had to just sit there."

An additional *action/intervention strategy* was listening. For classroom structure waiting, it is a strategy to appear attentive. As a seventh grader noted, "I'd be listening with the outskirts of my attention." Students attended just long enough to be aware of when they might have to respond.

The *consequence*s of classroom structure waiting are orderly classes. There are few disruptions. Students say some classes move more quickly and others more slowly because of the pace of the lesson, the type of activity, and the classroom rules. Slower classes are more repetitive. Faster classes are those in which new information is presented or where activities are more hands-on.

Instructional Waiting

Instructional waiting (see Figure 2) is the time in the class when new material in the form of content or process is presented. The *phenomenon* of waiting occurs because students already know the material (*causal condition*), or they learn it more quickly than others in the class. Cathy, an eighth grader, described it: "Most of the time we already know kind of what's going on, and we get things really fast, and the other kids are still trying to learn what they are doing." Adam, a sixth grader, commented,

> Like sometimes in math some of the other kids don't get it and I do. I would just sit there while the teacher helps them. Like in starting a new chapter and somebody doesn't under-stand . . . she writes it up on the board, and they still don't

Causal Conditions:
1. prior knowledge of material
2. rapid understanding of new material

Phenomenon:
Instructional waiting

Context:
1. classroom time when new material introduced
2. next day review of material

Intervening Conditions:
1. length of presentation
2. misbehavior inattention
3. meaningful content
4. classmate questions
5. teaching strategies
6. gender

Action/ Interaction Strategies:
1. listening for information
2. flipping through book
3. watching
4. rereading/ reworking
5. daydreaming
6. self-assignments

Consequences:
1. boredom
2. lack of movement through the curriculum
3. impatience
4. 20% lost instructional time
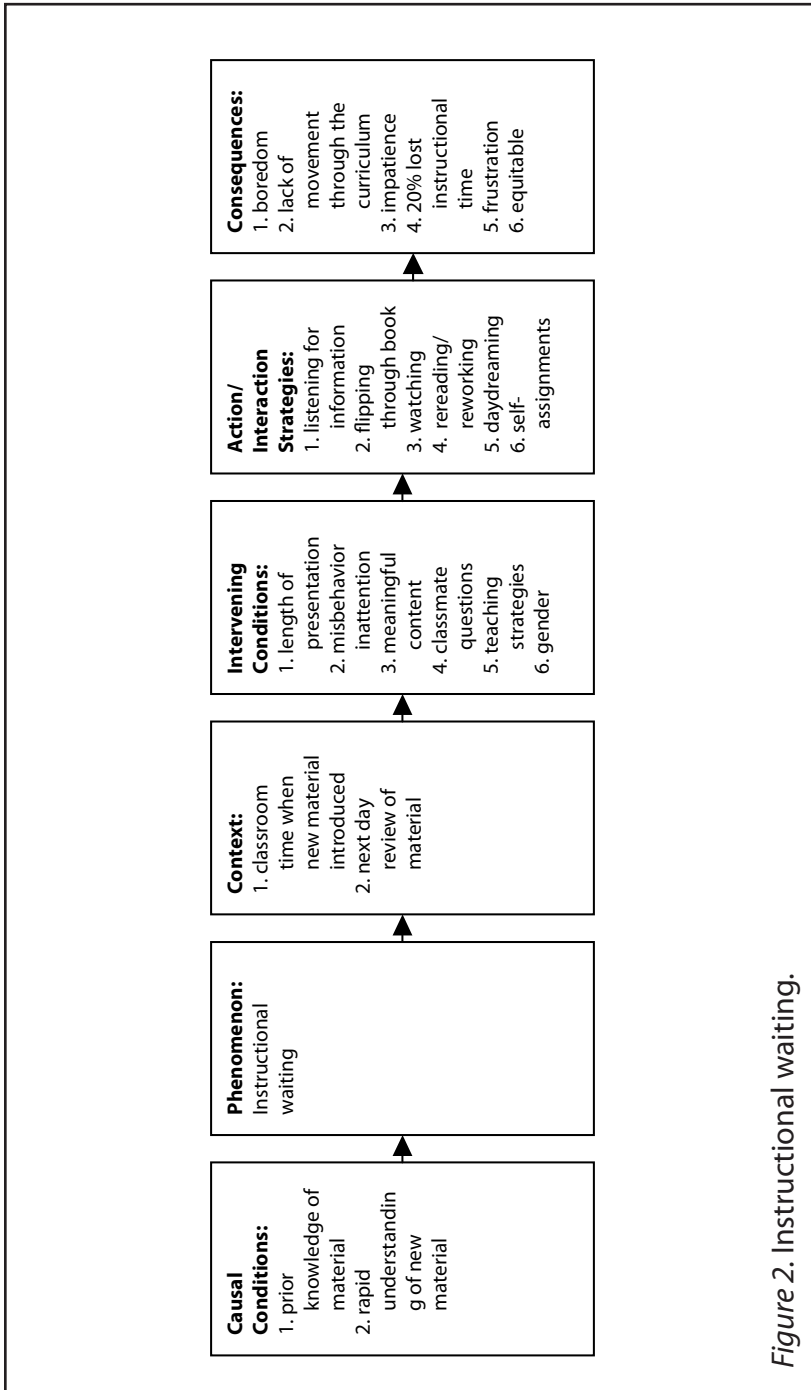5. frustration
6. equitable

Figure 2. Instructional waiting.

understand, so she goes through it again until they do understand.

Mitzi, a first grader, talked about math and reading: "I already know all the problems," and "I know all the words."

Across grade levels students described a sense they have about their own rate of learning—that they learn material faster then many others in the classroom. Rachel, a seventh grader, summed it up best: "The teacher says what we're learning, and we already know what to do, and we learn it, and we've got it all down and some of the others haven't gotten it, then we're ahead of them."

Seven *intervening conditions* facilitating or constraining instructional waiting were described. Kristi, a fifth grader, talked about the time teachers spend introducing new material: "They just like repeat things and keep going over and over it and it gets kind of boring after awhile." Cathy, an eighth grader, reported: "After she tells us what we are studying, I'm like, give me my homework so I can work on it while you're explaining it." She also described another variant at the start of the next day's lesson with a review of the previous day's concept: "Sometimes we have to go over it again the next day, and I'm sitting there like, 'Can we just check it please? I already know how to do it.'"

The behavior of others can have an effect on the flow of a lesson and change it from instructional time into waiting time. David, a seventh grader, said,

> Sometimes people ask questions that are, well, kind of obvious. We've gone by the stuff, and the teacher has to go back and explain it all again. That's the big time when I sit around and do nothing. It happens, probably, once or twice a week that I have to wait for them to catch stuff.

With a slightly different twist, Karen, a fourth grader, described:

> When we are reading our story my teacher will like talk about some words in there that maybe we don't understand, and that we need to know for like a test that's coming up. Then someone will raise their hand and have a comment and it just seems to start. We kinda get off the subject, and if you're not interested, you just have to sit there.

"In some of my classes," seventh grader Rachel remarked, "kids don't pay attention when the teacher is talking, so he winds up having to repeat a lot of stuff, even the directions for tests." Jennifer, a sixth grader, talked about her teacher the previous year who "spent a lot of time just having to discipline children." She felt that was a waste of time. Her heterogeneously grouped class moved much slower, and she preferred the ability grouping of middle school.

Another *intervening condition* in a class that affected students' perceptions about waiting was whether or not they thought the content was meaningful or repetitive. For example, "History is just the same old boring stuff over and over. You've always had the same, same, same, same events happen." On his map Doug characterized history class with a drawing of Old Faithful and wrote, "It just keeps erupting every day of the year." When Doug was asked if it was okay to wait at some time in his day, he said analogically,

> I'll use an example like band, when you're waiting for the director to work with the trumpets. You can sit there and look at your part while he's working with the trumpets. Then he goes over to the trombones and you're still waiting. But after he works with the trombones then you get up and the whole band performs. You get to put it together, and so that's okay to wait.

Gender was another *intervening condition* to instructional waiting. The voices of young women were more assertive and negative. All of the females used "boring" to describe instructional waiting. Rachel, a seventh grader, captured the sentiment, "It's boring just sitting there. I want the teacher to get done so we can move on." Richard, a fourth grader, seemed to be speaking of a similar condition but did not use the term when he said, "It like you have nothing to do 'cause you already read all the stuff that you have to do and you're waiting for the other kids."

Action/interactional strategies are processes the students use to get through the time while the teacher is presenting material they already know. Their strategies are purposeful and goal-oriented. They help the students "just work through to the end of the day"

(Doug, eighth grader). Some of the strategies are observable, but others are not so obvious. About his seventh-grade class, David said, "I just kind of sit there and listen and see if there's anything that I can get out of it that I don't already know about it." Mitzi, a first grader, remarked, "I just sit and wait for the stuff I don't know yet." David had another strategy, "I'd read ahead, or I'll be flipping through the textbook for the class." "I'd be just kind of watching and not completely paying attention" (Jennifer, sixth grader). Some students regard rereading assignments or checking their work while classmates are finishing as waiting. Greg, a third grader, noted, "I'm a fast reader and when we read pages silently, I finish fast, so lots of times she makes me read it again because she doesn't think I've finished it." Greg continued, "I get bored after I've done that . . . and I'd be daydreaming."

Two boys said they did not wait in the classroom. Jimmy, a first grader, talked about being usually one of the first to finish. When asked, "What do you do in math?" Jimmy said he has a packet of worksheets that he kept in his desk and "I have to do drawing on the backs of all my math papers, so I always have plenty to do." Nick, a second grader, reported he was a slow, careful worker so it took him longer. When he did finish early, he'd be "thinking about my game that night."

Consequences are the result of the *action/interaction strategies.* Boredom was mentioned most frequently as an outcome of waiting: "It's boring just sitting there. I get bored. Sometimes, the beginning of class just goes on forever and ever" (third grader). One student estimated he waited 20% of his instructional time. Students become impatient with the pace of the class: "I just want the teacher to get done so we can go on." Doug, an eighth grader, talked about the lack of movement through the material, "You already know the stuff, but the other people are trying to learn it and you can't advance." Two thirds of the participants talked about waiting as a negative experience.

On the other hand, even though he talked about waiting as negative, Greg, a third grader, said sometimes he does not mind waiting: "I'm kind of glad because I usually have a book I'm wanting to finish, so I say, 'take your time.'" Jennifer, a sixth grader, said, "I don't think it is a big deal, I mean, you just, I guess you just

sit there and learn it again. I guess it doesn't hurt you to make sure you know it." Karen, a fourth grader, contributes, "It makes me feel kind of proud to know that I can answer a lot of questions in class." David, a seventh grader, thought that the way things were done was fair: "Well, we're slightly held back, but its pretty much so we will be even in class and so that we'll have equal opportunities and things like that."

Assignment Waiting

The *phenomenon* of assignment waiting (see Figure 3) occurs during a class that is scheduled for extended practice, or seatwork, after the introduction of new concepts. Assignment waiting has three *causal conditions*. One is the fact that many gifted students finish all assigned work at a faster rate than other students: "The workbook pages go pretty fast because they are fairly easy." The second and third conditions are somewhat related—students who have all of their seatwork and homework assignments completed and have forgotten to carry a book to read.

The *context* for assignment waiting is very similar to the definition. Classroom time is designated for working on the practice assignment; instruction has been completed. The task is usually to complete a series of questions or worksheets that support the lesson of the day. This kind of waiting is easily observable, especially if the student has forgotten "my book to read." On the other hand, if the student thinks ahead, as many of the students in this sample do, they "are always looking toward the end of the day." They also "try to have it so I can get my work done at school, especially if I have a game that night," or "It's Wednesday and I know I am going to church."

Afterschool schedules and classroom computers are strong inhibitors, and therefore *intervening conditions* of assignment waiting. All the participants spoke about their afterschool activities, from piano lessons to gymnastics to ad hoc musical groups to organized practice for interscholastic academics or athletics. In order to pursue these activities, they planned strategies for completing seatwork at school so they do not need to take it home as homework. Some teachers, however, require that work in the
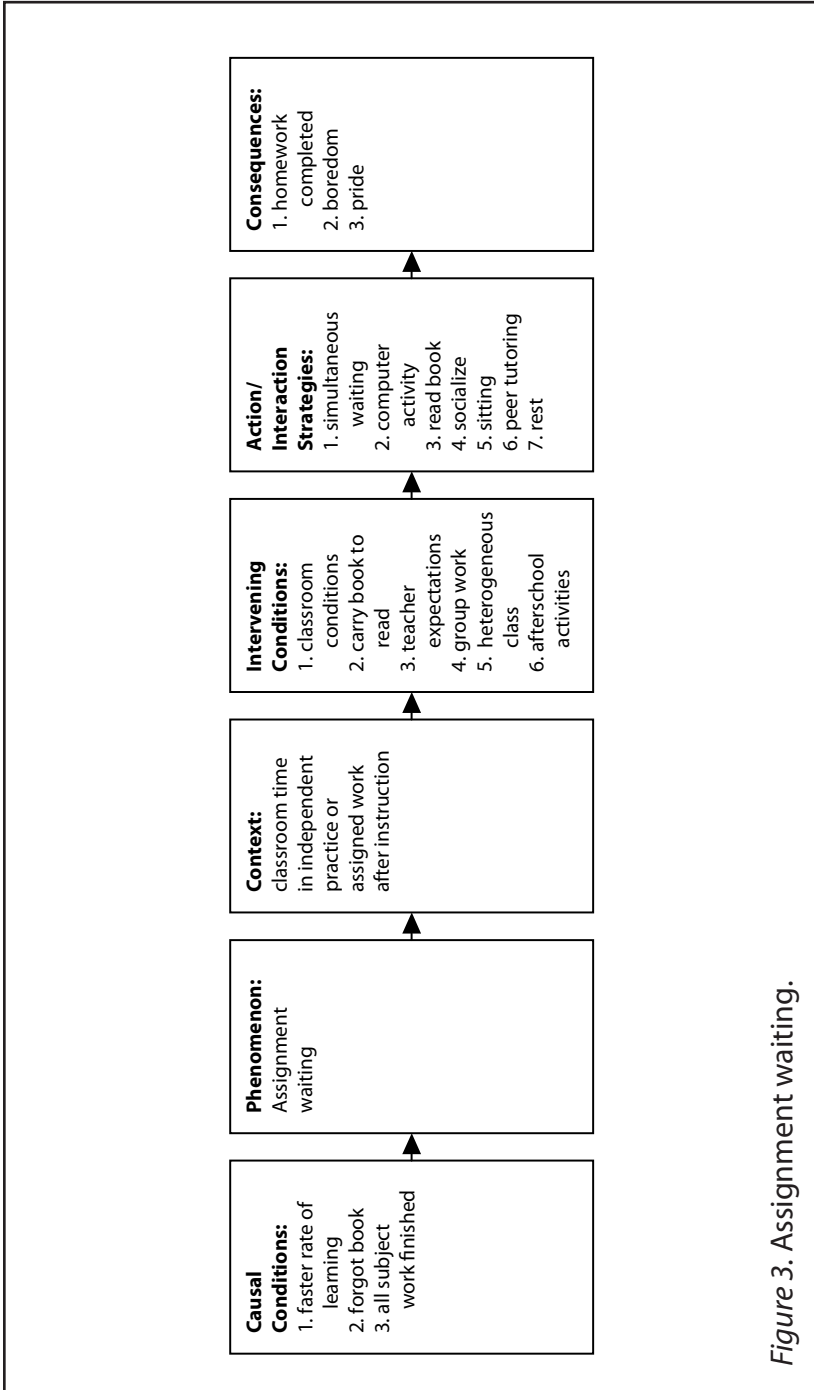
Causal Conditions:
1. faster rate of learning
2. forgot book
3. all subject work finished

Phenomenon: Assignment waiting

Context: classroom time in independent practice or assigned work after instruction

Intervening Conditions:
1. classroom conditions
2. carry book to read
3. teacher expectations
4. group work
5. heterogeneous class
6. afterschool activities

Action/ Interaction Strategies:
1. simultaneous waiting
2. computer activity
3. read book
4. socialize
5. sitting
6. peer tutoring
7. rest

Consequences:
1. homework completed
2. boredom
3. pride

Figure 3. Assignment waiting.

classroom be in the subject area; other teachers allow students to complete any work they have with them. "When I'm done and turn something in, I do other homework," Kim, a third grader, said. "If I have other work to do, and I'm bored, I'd be doing my work."

Computers in the classroom ameliorate assignment waiting. Fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms at Brown Carver Elementary School have five computer stations as part of a statewide effort to bring technology to schools. Students report that they often "play computers," when they have finished their seatwork. However, Richard, a fourth grader, while talking about the computer, added, "When I finish worksheets or a test early and I can't go to the computers, and I've already done my reading, I have to sit and wait for a while."

Teacher expectations affect assignment waiting. Students talked most about group assignment as an *intervening condition*. Student groups are not cooperative learning groups in which every member has an assigned task for contributing to the group goal. The learning groups students described and I[1] observed were formulated after the instructional phase of the lesson. Typically, the teacher put together a group of four students to "find the answers to questions 4–8 at the end of the chapter and report what you find. You have 15 minutes to complete the assignment." Karen, a fourth grader, said this was the situation in which she waited most often: "When we have group questions, they don't say anything, and finally, I say, 'Well, this is it.' The other students reply, 'Whatever.'"

Heterogeneous grouping leads to assignment waiting as well. Karen, a fourth grader, reported, "You're waiting for people to get done with their work. You've already gotten done and you don't have another assignment and you can't move on to the next subject until the class is ready. So, you're waiting, and you just have to sit there." Roberta, in second grade, echoed the sentiment: "There are kids in the class who have a lot of trouble with math. After we finish math, we have to wait for them to finish and it takes awhile. They don't finish their workbooks very fast either."

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[1]   First author

An *action/intervention strategy* used by students caught in the assignment waiting dilemma was observed in an eighth-grade social studies classroom. The teacher listed the activities for the day as students sat and listened for the number of workbook pages to be completed after his lecture. The workbooks are consumable, but at Shannon Vista Middle School, they are not used directly. Instead, the students copy material out of the book onto a separate page or pages. As soon as the teacher made the assignment, students began working on them. At one point the teacher reminded them during the lecture to be attentive and they would begin the workbook "in a few minutes." Students ignored the comments. Three or four minutes later, the teacher said, "Close your workbooks if you are working on them now, and listen to the rest of the lecture." Students put the workbook on their laps with the textbook on the desk and continued to work. The lecture was followed by a video, and students continued to work even in the dim lighting. The teacher gave some concluding comments, and 5 minutes remained. The students who had kept working were finished with the workbook pages and had some time for socializing or working on other assignments. Other *action/intervention strategies* of students for dealing with assignment waiting were computer activity, reading a book, socializing, peer tutoring, and resting and sitting. Jennifer, a sixth grader, reported that she "liked to have the time to rest, especially in the class period after lunch."

The *consequences* of assignment waiting can be positive: no homework. As mentioned above, Karen, a fourth grader, mentioned that she felt "proud" knowing answers and having homework done. The consequences can be negative—boredom—especially if a student does not have a book. If the students are not allowed to talk, "you just have to sit there."

Student Maps

The student maps were used to confirm ideas emerging from the interviews and observations. Maps were analyzed based on a rubric developed after multiple readings of them and recognition that the maps were mostly linear representations of progression through the school day. Students depicted movement by using

arrows or dots. Maps showing specific class hours after fifth grade denoted boring, fun, or okay. They functioned as a means for triangulating the results.

Grounded Theory

The analysis revealed three kinds of waiting: classroom structure, instructional, and assignment located in the regular classroom. The classrooms in one school system were similar to each other and very much like most readers' experiences as students in age-grade classrooms with some ability grouping. The classroom is not only a physical setting, but also a mediator of time experienced by gifted students.

In this section, the analysis is taken further to selective coding and the creation of a core category that is at the heart of grounded theory formation. The core category is "the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116).

Core Category: "Waiting Is Boring; Sometimes, Waiting Is Fair."

Gifted students are expected to follow the timelines and expectations of the instructional sequence, which have the consequence of gifted children sitting and waiting. The core category for gifted students is, "Waiting is boring; sometimes, waiting is fair." Three propositional statements explain the core category using student voices. Each proposition stands alone as a particular kind of experience for gifted children in the regular classroom and at the same time they are interrelated and cumulate in the classroom into "Waiting is boring; sometimes, waiting is fair."

Already knowing. "Most of the time we already kind of know what's going on, and we get things really fast" (eighth grader). Proposition 1: Students enter any classroom at different levels of achievement and at different levels of readiness for learning the lessons. Classroom procedures overlook variations among students. Gifted students with their particular strengths are ignored.

At every grade level from 1–8, participants talked about already knowing and having to wait. "Sometimes some of the other kids didn't get it, and I would. Like when we're starting a new chapter and she explains it and some kids don't get it. So, she'll have to go through it again until they do" (sixth grader). A first grader reported similar experiences.

Teachers were observed using techniques to ensure all students were together on the same page moving at the same rate. One approach is to reprimand children for working ahead. Another approach is: "Everyone put down your pencil after you finish the first four problems so we can check them before we go on." Students coped with this in middle school by working ahead and not asking questions of the teachers out of sequence. When the teacher had a predictable sequence, they would count ahead so they knew when to pay attention. Another teaching approach, especially at the elementary school level, is: "Hold up your hand when you have an answer. I'll be waiting to see your hands so I know everyone is finished." A related procedure is: "When you are finished turn your papers over and we will check them when everyone is finished." In these instances there are multiple points for waiting in a lesson: introduction, directions given, papers checked, and so forth. A seventh grader explained, "You get sort of used to it [waiting]. It happens so many times that when it starts, you don't really notice it. You don't really see what is going on because you are so used to it happening before."

Adjusted doing. "I'd be drawing or playing with my protractor" (fifth grader). Proposition 2: Waiting is boring, so students develop strategies for working through times in class when they have nothing to do in the assigned work. The students are not doing what the teacher expects.

At every grade level strategies for dealing with waiting are evident. Students often sit and appear to be listening, "but mostly I am looking at the teacher and thinking about other things, like my next class. I'd really like to be going on to the next topic" (seventh grader). Reading a book was the most common coping activity for 15 of the 16 students: "And if I didn't have a book, I might be looking around the room to see what my friends are doing or

wanting the clock to hurry up so I wouldn't have to wait much longer" (fourth grader). Other strategies are drawing or doodling.

"Working on assignments from other classes or subjects" was described in grades 4, 6, 7, and 8. In ability-grouped classes, teachers want student to stay on the lesson, too. A third grader in such a class reported, "I would be walking around the room the long way to get to the pencil sharpener or asking the teacher to go to the bathroom." In one classroom the students were allowed to talk when finished, so students would look for others to finish.

Of course, in some cases the only strategy is to sit and wait: "Sometimes there is nothing else to do!" (first grader). An eighth grader lamented the review days before the standardized mandated testing as entire days of waiting: "I might kind of lay my head down and sort of sleep, just sitting there."

As mentioned above, not every gifted student sits and waits. Two participants did not perceive they were waiting. A first-grade boy gave himself assignments to do—drawing. If he was drawing, he was not waiting, in his view. The other student, a second grader, said he did not wait because he did not rush. However, and significantly, both of these boys readily talked about times they finished their work before others. So, the potential to sit and wait is there, but they do not see it.

As with the case of waiting in Proposition 1, students who already know the material, waiting in Proposition 2 is "boring" if students do not have an alternative strategy for using the leftover time. Students may have no real choices but to sit and wait. When this happened, the participants followed the class rules or found something to do that made them look as though they were following the rules. Some did nothing, and that was fine with the teachers.

Being fair. "I think it's just fair that everyone else should understand the things as well as I should. The whole class should understand something before you move on to something else" (seventh grader). Proposition 3: Waiting has value. These gifted students expressed dissatisfaction with the pace of their schooling, yet they have a sense of a broader social context about school: that waiting places them within a framework of general

achievement for all, and a personal context that waiting has some personal value.

The story of Proposition 3 is not as much about the students as it is a story of my deepening understanding of the meaning of waiting to the students. I[2] did not want to prime students by using the word "boring" in the interviews so I scrupulously did not use it in my questioning. When the word appeared repeatedly, I judged it as negative. However, by including a question about thinking of a time when it was okay to wait, I gave them an opportunity to say more about waiting. I had anticipated they would say waiting was positive when waiting for recess or getting ready to go home. But, there was something else there. Reading through the data repeatedly, it took some time to see some children mentioned a positive side to waiting.

A fifth-grade girl said, "Nobody has the same IQ, so they're probably not going to learn as fast as you. You just have to wait for them to learn or else they will never learn." A third-grade girl and a fifth-grade boy said they used extra time to help their class-mates. "Especially," said the girl, "when we're working in groups because nobody can be done until everybody is done." A seventh-grade student remarking on waiting said, "That's pretty much so that we'll be even in class, and so that we'll have equal opportunities and things like that."

Waiting has positive value because students perceive something beneficial is happening for them as they wait. They are often bored because they have learned the material or work quickly, yet it is fair because students noted that others learn at different rates, they can help others, and they can do things for themselves. Having to wait gives one time "to read a good book." As one third grader remarked, "It makes me kind of proud to wait." A first-grade student noted, "Sometimes it feels good not to have anything to do." This thought was echoed by a sixth grader, "Sometimes I like to sit in class and kind of rest."

The idea of waiting being fair is not mentioned as frequently as the ideas of already knowing and adjusted doing. However, the idea of fairness is present across the grade levels. Of those who

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[2] First author

said waiting was boring, six indicated that there was something more. They wanted to move ahead through the content at their own rate, but everyone in the class has the right to learn what the gifted students already know, and they find value in not working all the time.

Implications

Sitting and waiting as a phenomenon is not new to those who specialize in gifted child education, although it has not been studied to our knowledge previously. Students have been complaining about it for years. This study interjects the key student perspective into our understanding of the phenomenon. We find the obvious and the subtle as in "waiting is boring; sometimes waiting is fair," which demonstrates that not everything about waiting is negative. Students perceive the situation in their own ways. Waiting, from the student perspective, happens at multiple points during the school day. Unquestionably, a universal feature of the regular classroom experience for these students who are gifted is sitting and waiting. The two exceptions spoke of finishing early, but have strategies for dealing with it. Being in a mixed-ability or ability-grouped class made no difference in the experience of sitting and waiting in this study. The students want to move on to new material.

These recurrent moments are a consequence of policies/customs of schools and teachers. The teachers implemented a general teaching procedure that was consistent with the state department of education evaluation policy for teachers. The teachers were behaving in a manner that corresponded to the process upon which their evaluations were based. Simply stated, teachers implemented whole-group teaching. Such teaching practices yield repeated, inescapable moments of sitting and waiting. Teachers did not engage in practices such as preassessment, which is a best practice in the education of gifted children, because it does not fit with whole-group instructional procedures.

Some waiting is a natural consequence of the ratio of adult to students in classes. As long as groups of children have to be

managed by a single adult, there will be moments of waiting. Even if we modify classroom practices that cause classroom waiting, instructional waiting, and assignment waiting, they will not go away.

Much of what constitutes waiting can likely be reduced by changing teaching and administrative practices. Keeping everyone together all of the time, given the range of ability and achievement in a classroom, is a clear example of a practice that could be altered. Throughout the study examples are presented of practices in the paradigm models that could be studied and perhaps changed.

The study points to some sticky issues in classroom life for teachers to consider. What is the place of reading as a substitute activity? What is the appropriate amount of student time devoted to helping others? How do others in the class deal with behavior of children who are gifted in an area? These questions are worthy of conversations among teachers and possible sources of future research.

Grounded theory is a methodology that could produce much useful information about the life of gifted children. Students have much to tell us, if we take the time to enter their world. Relatively few studies in gifted education attempt to do this. Qualitative inquiry is more likely to help us learn the student perspective, rather than the dominant adult researcher perspective. Digging into the ordinary parts of the lives of gifted children is a means for understanding their experience of being gifted. More studies pinpointing the ordinary are recommended.

Limitations

This study is the beginning of understanding sitting and waiting. The study makes no claim as to generalizations outside the setting of the study. Its usefulness is the insight it gives practitioners into their educational practices and environments. It is up to readers to fit this into their particular situations. Qualitative inquiry does not produce generalizations like those of quantitative research. Rather, the intent is to make the classroom life

more understandable by revealing the personal meanings of the students so that practices might be modified in response to that increased understanding of the student perspective. This study is an example of interpretive research, which means another researcher might discover different aspects of this phenomenon.

The study took place in a single school system in one Southern state. The demographics of the system are not typical for the nation. The study did not examine classrooms where practices common to gifted education were in use. It would be interesting to see whether the experience of waiting would be different in settings of that type. For example, does differentiation change the experience of sitting and waiting?

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