

# Teaching gifted and talented students

[Life](#), [Emotions](#)



Many educators have become well-versed in modifying the regular classroom curriculum to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Educators are not as experienced, however, in meeting the instructional needs of high-ability students. In a growing number of states, revisions in regulations pertaining to gifted and talented students are requiring that high-ability students, previously served in part-time pull-out programs, must also receive appropriate instruction within the context of their regular classrooms.

For example, in Kentucky, high-ability students can no longer be viewed as sufficiently served by a once-monthly or once-weekly program. These students have educational needs that must be met daily, just as students with disabilities have. Many regular education teachers report that meeting the needs of high-ability students equals and often exceeds the challenges of integrating disabled students in their classrooms. High-ability students can be delightful, but they can also be demanding, impatient, perfectionistic, sarcastic, and disruptive.

In addition, few regular education teachers have received sufficient training in issues related to gifted and talented education. Before teachers can develop appropriate instructional strategies to meet the needs of high-ability students, they must recognize the value of such efforts. For many educators, services to gifted and talented students may seem to be elitist. However, public education is founded on the belief that all students (including those with high abilities) have the right to instruction appropriate to their needs.

Gifted and talented students, like all students, should learn something new every day. General Strategies for Modifying the Curriculum The objectives for

modifying standard curricula for high-ability students include: meeting the learning capacity of the students, meeting the students' rapid rates of learning in all or some areas of study, and providing time and resources so that students can pursue areas of special interest. In order to modify standard curricula for high-ability students, Lois Roets (1993) proposed three options: lesson modifications, assignment modifications, and scheduling modifications. Lessons can be modified through acceleration or enrichment of content. Assignments can be modified through reducing regular classroom work or providing alternate assignments. Scheduling options include providing opportunities for high-ability students to work individually through independent study, shared learning in homogeneous groupings with peers of similar ability and interests, and participation in heterogeneous groupings of mixed-ability students.

Lesson Modifications. One way teachers can extend or enrich the content they present is by asking open-ended questions. Such questions stimulate higher order thinking skills and give students opportunities to consider and express personal opinions. Open-ended questions require thinking skills such as comparison, synthesis, insight, judgment, hypothesis, conjecture, and assimilation. Such questions can also increase student awareness of current events. Open-ended questions should be included in both class discussions and assignments. They can also be used as stimulation for the opening or conclusion of a lesson.

Another strategy for lesson modification developed by Susan Winebrenner (1992) is to use Bloom's taxonomy of six levels of thinking to develop lesson

content. Bloom's model implies that the "lower" levels (knowledge, comprehension, and application) require more literal and less complex thinking than the "higher" levels (analysis, evaluation, and synthesis). Teachers are encouraged to develop thematic units with activities for students at all ability levels. This strategy involves four steps. Teachers first choose a theme that can incorporate learning objectives from several different subject areas.

Secondly, teachers identify 6 to 10 key concepts or instructional objectives. Third, they determine which learner outcomes or grade-level competencies will be targeted for the unit. Finally, they design instructional activities to cover each of the six levels of thinking. Assignment Modifications High-ability students are often expected to complete assignments that they find boring or irrelevant because they represent no new learning for them. Allowing them to reduce or skip standard assignments in order to acquire time to pursue alternate assignments or independent projects is called curriculum compacting. The curriculum for a gifted student should be compacted in those areas that represent his or her strengths. When students "buy time" for enrichment or alternate activities, they should use that time to capitalize on their strengths, rather than to improve skills in weaker subjects. For example, a student advanced in math should have a compacted curriculum in that area with opportunities given for enriched study in mathematics. The first step in compacting the curriculum is determining the need to do so.

A student is a candidate for compacting if he or she regularly finishes assignments quickly and correctly, consistently scores high on tests related

to the modified area, or demonstrates high ability through individualized assessment, but not daily classwork (i. e. , he or she is gifted, but unmotivated for the standard curriculum). The second step in compacting the curriculum is to create a written plan outlining which, if any, regular assignments will be completed and what alternate activities will be accomplished. A time frame for the plan should also be determined.

Modification plans can be limited to a few days (i. e. , length of lesson or chapter) or extend over the course of an entire school year. Alternate assignments for high-ability students can either be projects related to the modified area of study that extend the curriculum, or they can be independent projects that are chosen based on students' individual interests. Winebrenner (1992) described a strategy in which students use written independent study contracts to research topics of interest to become "resident experts." The students and teacher decide upon a description and the criteria for evaluating each project.

A deadline is determined, and by that date, each student must share his or her project with the entire class. Before choosing their projects, students are also given time to browse various areas of interest. After completing compacted work, students are allowed to look through research materials to explore various topics. A deadline for choosing a topic for independent projects is also given to the students to limit their browsing time. Scheduling Modifications Cooperative learning through traditional heterogeneous groups is often counterproductive for high-ability students.

When the learning task involves a great deal of drill and practice, these students often end up doing more teaching than learning. When placed in homogeneous cooperative learning groups, however, gifted students can derive significant learning benefits. This does not mean that high-ability students should never participate in heterogeneous cooperative learning groups. Rather, groupings should be chosen based on the task that is being assigned. When the task includes drill and practice, such as math computation or answering comprehension questions about a novel, gifted students should be grouped together and given a more complex task.

When the task includes critical thinking, gifted students should be part of heterogeneous groups to stimulate discussions. Open-ended activities are excellent choices for heterogeneous groupings. Cluster grouping of high-ability students in the same classroom is another option for meeting the needs of gifted students in the regular classroom. The traditional method of assigning students to classes has often been to divide the high-ability students equally among the available classes so each teacher would have his or her “ fair share. Under this system, however, each teacher must develop strategies for modifying the curriculum to meet the needs of the advanced students. With cluster grouping, four to six high-ability students are placed in the same classroom. This system allows the students to learn with and from each other and reduces the need for multiple teachers to develop appropriate instructional modifications.

Case Studies The following case studies describe how the curriculum was modified for three academically able students. Mark Mark entered first grade reading at a fourth-grade level. He had mastered math concepts that challenged his first-grade peers.

He was placed in a second-grade class for math instruction and in a third-grade class for reading and spelling instruction. Despite these opportunities, Mark was always the first to finish assignments and spent the majority of his school day reading library books or playing computer games. His parents and teacher were concerned that he was not sufficiently challenged, but as a 6-year-old, he was too young to participate in the district's pull-out gifted program. They were also concerned that he was having difficulty developing friendships in his classroom since he spent much of the day apart from his homeroom peers.

A request for consultation was made to the school psychologist. With input from Mark's parents and teachers, an independent study contract was developed for Mark to channel his high reading abilities toward study in a specific area. After browsing for a week, he chose dinosaurs as his project area. Mark then narrowed his focus to the Jurassic Period and decided to create a classroom reference book complete with pictures he drew. When he completed his daily work, Mark researched his topic area and worked on his project. When completed, Mark's teacher asked him to share his project with his classmates.

Because he had chosen a topic of high interest to his peers, Mark's status as "resident expert" on dinosaurs made him attractive to his classmates.

Mark's teacher encouraged these budding friendships by asking the other students to bring dinosaur toys and books from home to share with the class during the following weeks. Katrina Katrina's parents chose to move her from a private school to public school at the end of her third-grade year. Following

the advice of the private school staff, Katrina's parents enrolled her in a second year of third grade at the public school due to reported weaknesses in reading and written expression.

After a few weeks of school, Katrina's teacher approached the school psychologist with her concern that retention may not have been in Katrina's best interest. The teacher reported that Katrina was performing on grade level in all areas and demonstrated high-ability math skills. Upon meeting with Katrina's parents, however, they expressed the desire to keep her in the third grade. They felt that Katrina had suffered no harmful effects from the retention since it involved a move to a new school with different peers.

Further, Katrina's parents reported that she felt very comfortable and successful in her classroom. Although the committee decided to keep Katrina in the third grade, they developed a compacted curriculum for her in the area of math. A contract was written specifying modifications for Katrina in the regular class math curriculum. She was required to complete half of the assignments given to her peers, as long as she did so with 90% or higher accuracy. When finished with her modified assignment, Katrina then used her time earned through compacting for enriched study in mathematics.

The committee was careful to avoid presenting material to Katrina that she would study in the future to avoid the possibility of repetition. Instead, an enriched program of study was developed that emphasized critical thinking and problem solving related to the addition and subtraction being taught in her classroom. Katrina's contract included several choices of activities, any of which she could choose to do on a given day, such as creating story



problems for the class to solve, drawing pictures or using manipulatives to demonstrate calculation problems, or activities involving measuring, classifying, estimating, and graphing.

Katrina's teacher would present a specific activity choice in these areas that extended and enriched the basic concepts being taught to the class as a whole. With these modifications, Katrina's advanced skills in math were addressed. Her parents and teacher judged her school year a success, and Katrina made an easy transition to fourth grade, where she was able to work on grade-level material with an average level of accuracy in all areas. Adam demonstrated a very high spoken vocabulary and advanced ideas when participating in class.

He completed few of his assignments, though, and showed strong resistance to putting pencil to paper despite obvious high abilities. He was able to read orally at a level 2 years above his fourth-grade status and could perform multidigit calculation problems mentally. However, in the classroom, Adam demonstrated task avoidance and disruptive behaviors. His teacher and parents were frustrated by his lack of work output and behavior problems, and they sought assistance from the school psychologist. In interviewing Adam, the psychologist found that he did not see the need to put on paper answers he already knew.

It seemed likely that Adam's behavior problems were related to boredom and frustration. To test this theory, the psychologist recommended the use of Winebrenner's (1992) "Most Difficult First" strategy. With this strategy, the teacher identifies the most difficult portion of an assignment and the

student is allowed to attempt that portion of the assignment first. If he or she completes it with 100% accuracy, the student is excused from the remainder of the assignment and allowed to use his or her free time to pursue an alternate activity.

Adam was resistant to this strategy at first, but he quickly saw its advantages and began completing those assignments that were modified using the strategy. With guidance from the school psychologist, Adam's teacher then extended modifications to include pretesting and compacting opportunities across the curriculum. Adam used his time earned from compacting to pursue independent projects and recreational reading, and his behavior problems decreased accordingly. Conclusion The focus of educational services for high-ability students is shifting to the regular classroom.

While this expansion of services to the regular classroom is a welcome recognition of the need to challenge high-ability students all day, every day, this initiative also brings with it a significant need to train regular education teachers. Support staff such as educators of gifted and talented students and school psychologists must learn to become effective consultants to assist regular classroom teachers in applying instructional strategies appropriate for meeting the needs of high-ability students References Roets, L. (1993). *Modifying standard curriculum for high ability students*. New Sharon, IA: Leadership Publishers.

Winebrenner, S. (1992). *Teaching gifted kids in the regular classroom*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit. One of the biggest complaints that teachers

<https://assignbuster.com/teaching-gifted-and-talented-students/>

hear from truly gifted students is that instead of having different or more challenging work, they simply have more of the same work every other student is assigned. For most parents, it is difficult to understand the difference. They see their child who can write and read well, and who can do math calculations easily and quickly and think that by having twice as much homework, the student's needs are being served. Unfortunately, they are wrong.

While there has been a significant push to improve the lot of students with disabilities, programs for the truly gifted student are often left to their own devices. Without training and supervision, some teachers will be intimidated by their precocious class and rather than opening doors to more advanced insight, will simply load students down with what amounts to busy work. A child who already knows how to read and write well, probably should not be burdened with basic grammar exercises. Instead, this student should be reading for research and writing essays. This isn't beyond the scope of truly gifted children as young as nine or ten.

But with funding cut at every turn and demands being made on public schools to provide services beyond the scope of mere education, too often G/T programs are left to their own devices. The solution lies in the intervention of parents and the interest of the community at large. This is the point where mentors from various professions can spark a bored but talented student to the next level. Imagine how much more interesting a talk about cancer cells would be from a visiting oncologist. People in the

community are often more than willing to help, but it takes more than just teachers making the request. Parents have to get involved.

Quite often parents are the first to notice their child's abilities. Some schools will try to put off testing or divert attention, but the parent needs to be their child's advocate. Students are legally entitled to and schools are federally mandated to offer programs for students according to their abilities. This means that gifted children deserve and should receive educational work commensurate with their abilities. Don't take no for an answer. Parental involvement can be a double-edged sword. Gifted programs need parents to push school districts to offer and support programs for gifted students that go past minimum standards.

Without parental pressure, districts will ignore programs and allow them to atrophy. But it is also important that the need for parents to view their children as gifted isn't allowed to drive the enrollment of the program. In some district, testing for admission has become a tug of war for parents to get their children into programs viewed as having better teachers or lower enrollment. While any gifted student should be encouraged to take more challenging courses, it is a mistake to simply place a student into a program. It is also a mistake to water down curriculum in order to raise enrollment in advanced classes.

Students need to be in programs that fit. Some students are good across the board learners and will be in language arts, science and math programs; other students have abilities in just math or just language arts. Make sure your student is in classes that fit his or her needs. Many parents make the

mistake of thinking that having a child in a G/T program of classes is a ticket to academic success. That isn't really the case. Students in advanced classes suffer from some of the same problems that students in regular classes endure. And students in gifted classes have been known to fail.

Failure is seen as anathema for most parents, but especially those of gifted students. Their first reaction is to blame the teacher or the school.

Sometimes that action is justified, but just as often students make the choice to fail. Sometimes the decision to fail is an attempt to fit into the prevailing social structure of the school. Gifted students sometimes have difficulty dealing with their peers and will "dumb down" in order to fit in. Other times, learning disabilities such as ADD or anxiety will create situations in which the gifted student has problems processing or completing work.

This doesn't mean the student doesn't deserve to be in an advanced program; it means that the student's educational disabilities need assistance in much the same way that a nearsighted student needs glasses to see the board. It's a balancing act. One of the biggest hurdles gifted students face is the social acceptance within the school. In some schools being in the gifted program is a mark of excellence. In others, it labels you as a nerd and causes problems that can be difficult for a shy or immature student to overcome.

Teachers and parents should always monitor their student for situations where they are settling for lower recognition in order to avoid confrontation or bullying. This is especially a problem for some minority students and needs parental intervention and outside activities in church or the community in order to give the student a social support structure. Students such as this

thrive in activities such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, church service, community volunteer programs and other activities that require a level of independence.

By having a group of friends outside of school, the gifted student won't feel the need to mitigate their own achievements in the classroom in order to keep friends. Finally, and this is a very hard situation, parents have to learn to separate their personal needs from the accomplishments of their child. It's very easy to look at the kid who does math and science well and try to push them into a program for Med school. Don't do it. Gifted kids learn quickly, but they also suffer from the same false starts and lagging development that other kids experience. The failure or success of your gifted child belongs to them.

And if that is the case, parents have to develop a hands off policy towards homework and projects. Teachers can spot the project where Mom or Dad tweaked something here or added something there. By intervening on such projects, parents dilute the learning experience and undermine their child's self-confidence. Gifted children often have self-doubt because they are doing things that are months or sometimes years beyond their peers. Don't exacerbate that by taking over the learning experience. Gifted children can offer a great deal of joy, but they are also a huge challenge. Quite often they will offer opinions far beyond their years and understand provocative situations while still appearing innocent.

It is important to support your child without smothering them. No matter what their abilities, they will still suffer the same teen angst and doubt held

by others of their age. Roll with the punches, expect to be challenged and encourage them to explore areas beyond their comfort zone academically.

BACKGROUND <http://www.azagt.org/teaching-gifted.html> Common wisdom of the day once said bright children take care of themselves. Leta Hollingworth didn't believe a word of it.

Instead, she thought teaching gifted students required specialized environments designed to bring out the full range of talents of the student. Hollingworth stumbled onto the concept of teaching gifted and talented students in a different way than the ordinary when her own teaching career hit a dead end. Hollingworth had been born and raised in Nebraska. She even graduated from the University of Nebraska at the age of 20, in 1906. Two years later, Leta Anna Stetter (Hollingsworth) moved to New York City and married Harry Levi Hollingworth, a Columbia University graduate student.

Expecting to resume her teaching career in New York, her plan failed when she learned no one in New York City hired married women as teachers. Bored with the prospect of being a housewife for the rest of her life, Hollingworth took the next step in developing the methods for teaching gifted students still in use today. She enrolled at graduate school, too. Perhaps it was here that her interest in teaching gifted children sparked to life. She studied educational psychology and became a Columbia University professor. She focused her research and studies on finding the origins of human intelligence.

She measured thousands of babies and monitored others for decades. It seems to have been important to Hollingworth to uncover any gender issues before tailoring methods for teaching gifted children of either gender. Her meticulous studies debunked the idea of female inferiority. Over the years, her research and her methods for teaching gifted children led to more research and more books. She considered it vital to identify gifted children at as early an age as possible. She also advocated grouping gifted children with other gifted children instead of placing them in classes designed for the average student.

Because Hollingworth considered daily contact a key component to her methods of teaching gifted and talented students, she eventually established a school in New York that was devoted to exceptionally bright students. Instead of a teacher-led program of study, the flow of the education was student driven instead. Hollingworth felt her special students would benefit from knowing about some of the challenges life might send their way. To prepare them, her curriculum for teaching gifted students included learning experiences based on issues they were likely to encounter at some point in their adult lives.