



October 2003

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Beyond the Label-- Teaching Gifted Children

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Characteristics of giftedness are a kaleidoscope of distinctive attributes; they shift and change color and texture for each gifted individual. One child may have resourcefulness and be extremely perceptive, yet another child may have task commitment and leadership skills, while another child may be highly creative and demonstrate incredible persistence. As we learn more about how the brain works and shift our views of intelligence, we see how giftedness is manifested in a variety of ways.

Many myths dominate our perceptions of students labeled "gifted." For example, gifted students are often seen as not needing anything. Some educators surmise that because these students are already bright, accommodations are not necessary. However, all students need the appropriate level of challenge and support for maximum learning-- and this is certainly true for gifted students.

When gifted students are not appropriately challenged, they are in danger of not developing the resources necessary to cope with strenuous work. Instead of learning how to struggle, they become accustomed to school being easy and earning *As* with little effort. When gifted students are not appropriately supported, they may choose to

"opt out" of challenging courses and may struggle with trying to live up to the expectations placed upon them.

Providing appropriate challenge to students is no easy task, but neither is it a matter of choice ("No Child Left Behind" legislation), or a perk to please parents. Meeting the needs of students who require experiences beyond the standard curriculum must be part of an equitable education program that nurtures all students.

The most effective strategies for providing challenge and support for all students can be embedded in differentiated instruction that focuses on high standards. Differentiated instruction can be as intricate as using learning centers and cubing, and as straightforward as carefully crafted and scaffolded questions, but it always leads students toward the achievement of high standards.

The first steps toward a differentiated classroom are acknowledging the variety of learners within the class and proactively planning for their learning needs. The main attributes of a differentiated classroom include starting where students are (pre-assessment), being flexible, having multiple avenues to access and process content, and including opportunities to create products that reflect evidence of student learning.

Gifted children, like all children, desire to be more than just a label—they need adults in their lives to truly see them, to teach them, and to support and challenge them.

Strategies For Meeting The Needs of Students Who Require Greater Challenge

- Pre-Assessment- Students receive opportunities to show what they know about a topic before it is taught. Using this information, teacher plan lessons that will provide new and appropriate learning experiences for all students. Examples might include: writing prompts, student demonstrations, pretests, and/or KWL graphic organizers that are revisited at the end of the learning experiences.
- Compacting – Teachers use data from preassessment to identify students who are ready to move ahead in the curriculum and adjust instruction accordingly. Examples might include: allowing students to engage in independent study, hands-on projects / activities, and group or individual investigation to explore a topic more in depth.
- Flexible Grouping – Students work in a variety of settings with attention paid to skill readiness, current knowledge, and progress toward mastery of objectives. Movement among groups is frequent and fluid. Examples might include: small group, pair, whole group and individual work that allow students to pursue their interests, engage in risk taking, and demonstrate evidence of their capabilities and needs.
- Cubing – Students think about a topic from a variety of perspectives. Tasks are placed on the six sides of a cube and require students to use higher level thinking skills. Students roll cubes and complete designated tasks. Examples for one cube when studying kinetic and potential energy might include: Create a physical routine or dance to demonstrate

different ways to convert potential energy to kinetic energy; write one paragraph to describe the relationship between work, kinetic energy, and potential energy; and design a poster to show how the transfer of energy can be compared to the transfer of money. Cubing examples can be found at: <http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/department/eii/sckineticpotential.pdf>



Resources

Accelerated and Enriched Instruction (AEI) website with instructional and informational resources, at www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/eii/bestpracticespg.htm

ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, downloadable articles and publications, at www.eric.org

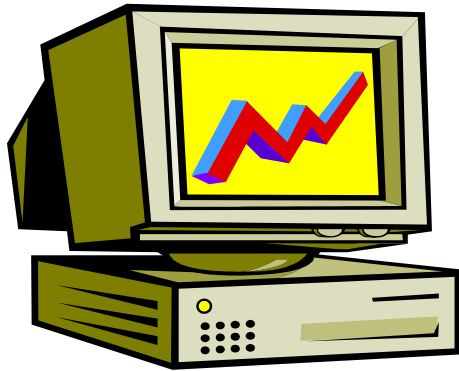
National Research Center on Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut, downloadable articles and publications, at <http://www.ucc.uconn.edu/%7Ewwwgt/nrcgt.html>

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, downloadable articles and publications at <http://www.nwrel.org/nwedu/fall%5F97/>

Rimm, Sylvia, *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades*. Three Rivers Press, New York, 1995.

Tomlinson, Carol Ann and Allan, Susan Demirsky, *Leadership for Differentiating Classrooms and Schools*. ASCD, 2000.

Winebrenner, Susan, *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom*, Free Spirit Publishing, 2001.



Data-Driven Decisions

The eLearning team has been working collaboratively with the Office of Shared Accountability and the Office of Global Access Technology to provide training on Student Information Management System (SIMS), Data Warehouse and the Instructional Management System (IMS). In the past several months and continuing throughout the year, training will be provided to ensure that data is readily available to inform school-wide and classroom instructional decisions. Core teams at every school have received initial training on the use of the web-based tools to monitor student achievement and to analyze school performance for school improvement planning. Ongoing training will be provided to enhance these skills and to provide continual follow up as new features and resources are added to both Data Warehouse and IMS.

SIMS provides school staff with tools to access student biographical data, standardized test scores, Special Education Data System (SEDS) data, report card data, and more. The SIMS files are used in Filemaker Pro, allowing schools to customize the information and generate reports in a variety of formats to meet their needs. SIMS training is offered at Connecticut Park throughout the school year and summer.

IMS allows teachers and administrators to access current monitoring tools, analyze student performance individually and by grade level, and inform instruction and prescribe interventions using the resources available on the site. Currently, IMS is available to school core teams and teachers in grades K-3. Training is ongoing and as additional resources are added, follow up support will be provided.

Data Warehouse is a web-based application used to analyze historical, demographic, and multi-dimensional data for addressing the System of Shared Accountability (SSA) targets, standards, and school improvement goals. Data, which is presented in different formats, can be imported into a word processing document, a spreadsheet, or a PowerPoint presentation for further analysis, distribution, or display.

To learn more about the Student Data Systems or to register for training, log on to the eLearning website: <http://www.mcps-elearning.us>.

Reminder!

November 3 is the deadline to submit names to the Office of Human Resources to request Consulting Teacher assistance for teachers in your school.

Upcoming Learning Opportunities



Staff Development Teachers:

If you have questions, please contact Sharon Hemphill via First Class and/or phone 301-601-4600.

- **SDT Meeting (voluntary)**
Audience: 1 section for SDTs new to the position; 1 section for secondary .2 SDTs
November 4, 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM
- **Level-alike Professional Learning Communities**
Audience: Middle & High School SDTs (In schools that split the SDT position among several people, at least one SDT should attend.)
November 7, 8:00 AM - 3:00 PM
- **Evidence of Student Learning**
Audience: Elementary SDTs
November 13, 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM
- **Reaching All Students: Matching Learning Styles with Teaching Strategies**
Audience: Elementary SDTs
November 13, 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM

- **Quad-Cluster/Consortium Mtg.**
November 25, 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM
Audience: All SDTs
(In schools that split the SDT position among several people, at least one SDT should attend.)

Curriculum Implementation Sessions for Secondary Teachers:

Classroom teachers will be paid \$20.00 per hour for participation. If you have any questions, please contact Linda Natale via First Class and/or phone 301-601-4600. Online Registration is at: <http://coldfusion.mcps.k12.md.us/cfms/training/search.cfm?segment=14>

- **Math A, B, C:** Nov. 6, 4:30 – 6:30, Wood MS
- **English 7, 8, 9:** Nov. 5, 4:00 – 7:00, MCEA
- **Reading 6, 7, 8:** Nov. 6, 4:00 – 7:00, Richard Montgomery HS
- **Science 6, 7, 8:** Nov. 5, 3:30 – 6:30, Tilden MS
- **NSL Gov't. Rangefinding:** Nov. 18, 3:30 – 6:30 Edison Center

Published by the Office of Staff Development

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