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Differentiating Instruction for Gifted Learners in the Regular Classroom: A Quick-Reference Guide for Teachers

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Differentiating Instruction for Gifted Learners in the Regular Classroom:
A Quick-Reference Guide for Teachers

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
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Abstract

Today's educators face the daunting challenge of presenting mandated curriculum content to a very diverse set of students. Furthermore, their success as an educator is often determined by the scores their students earn on standardized tests at the year's end. Focus is therefore shifted to the struggling student population, and meanwhile, the advanced learners may be left to their own devices, at least as far as their education is concerned. While pullout programs are in place in some school districts, students usually spend the majority of their time in the regular education classroom, where their needs must be adequately met. In this study, several resources discussing the differentiation of education for gifted students in the regular classroom are examined and reported concisely. Teachers need to know where to begin their quest for information on the subject of differentiation, and they have no time to spare. It is the researcher's hope that this study will provide teachers with a solid starting point.

Keywords: differentiation, gifted student, regular classroom

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all of the wonderfully inspiring teachers I have had the privilege to know, and especially to Mrs. Salisbury, Mrs. Amonett, Mrs. Briscoe, Mrs.

Koski, Mrs. Pickett, Mrs. Schnoor, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Berry, and Mrs. Blackwell.

I hope to be to my students what you were to me. Thank you for your tireless devotion to the teaching profession. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my very first teachers,

Beth and Rickey White. Without your unwavering support, patience, and love, I would not have made it this far. I love you both.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

““We are terrified of the average student being “left behind,” ...and yet, our brightest children are expected to stay behind”” (White, 2012, para. 1). As a novice teacher and former gifted program participant, I vehemently echo this concerned parent’s sentiments. I have become increasingly curious about which strategies to use to keep gifted students engaged while they are in the regular classroom because of this very phenomenon. In my experience both as a student and as a teacher candidate, those who are identified as gifted typically spend one school day per week in a pullout program where they are with a teacher of the gifted and their fellow gifted peers. The remaining four days of the week are spent in the regular classroom. Should these students receive non-differentiated instruction for the majority of the week? No, certainly not. No highly qualified educator would intentionally ignore the needs of gifted students in the regular classroom; yet, it would appear that this very event is happening daily.

I became interested in the ways that effective teachers met the needs of gifted students within a regular classroom setting. How does a regular education teacher help the gifted students, and not just them, but everyone who needs something more than what traditional, regular teaching provides? While talking with experienced teachers and professors, and in my personal studies and research, the term *differentiated instruction* came up repeatedly as the way to reach all students with various needs in one regular classroom. Basically, teachers practice differentiation of instruction when they align various learning components to the learning abilities of the student and his or her individual needs; differentiation leads to greater student success (Tomlinson, 2000).

When perusing the plethora of available strategies, journals, books, and

technology-based materials on the subject of providing differentiation, I quickly became overwhelmed! There is no shortage of research on the means of differentiating instruction in the regular classroom. This is a seemingly good problem to have, but as a teacher who is focused on the needs of all her students, not just this select group, I find that my time for researching during the school year is limited. I am not able to adequately investigate the many resources available while balancing lesson planning, professional development, and instructional time. It is from this personal need of practical resources and strategies in differentiated processes for gifted students and my personal interest in best practices for those students in the regular classroom that this project was born.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

For the past five decades, at the very least, the debate over the cause of giftedness has not abated. Some maintained that giftedness was genetically inherited and innately developed; others believed that giftedness was a result of high-quality educational experiences and an enriching learning environment. Many people insist that giftedness is a result of both heredity and environment, and this theory of the origins of giftedness is commonly labeled as *nature versus nurture* debate (Clark, 1979). This squabble has continued through the years, as Winner (2000) points out; it may never be conclusively known whether intelligence and abilities of gifted children are purely genetic, based in ancestors' selective qualities of best mates and partners; or if the school and learning environments – those places where young and gifted children may attribute their learning and growing – are where the giftedness comes from. The current research is split. Consensus is not happening at this time; however, researchers are in agreement with the following statement: regardless of how gifted children got to be as exceptional as they are, they deserve an education which suits their academic needs.

According to the National Association for Gifted Children (2008), efforts to meet the needs of gifted students in America began as early as 1868. The NAGC cites the National Defense Education Act of 1958 as “the first large-scale effort by the federal government in gifted education” (2008, para. 24). Awareness and research of the gifted population continued to grow throughout the 20th century, picking up speed especially in the 1970s. At that time, individualized instruction was a popular form of meeting the academic needs of gifted students (Tomlinson, 2000). Like differentiated instruction,

individualized instruction took many forms, including peer tutoring (Ehly & Larsen, 1976), which is still prevalent today.

In the late 20th century, as funding for gifted education became increasingly sparse and programs were being cut, the notion that educational standards for all students should be made more rigorous began to be considered (Winner, 1997). This would, allegedly, lower the number of students who were placed in gifted programs and would, in turn, decrease the amount of money required for those programs and the students who truly needed the programs would benefit more from them. Despite the need for change, no action on the subject of amending education in the United States came until the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was signed into law.

The term *differentiation*, as used in conjunction with gifted students, has been a commonplace phrase since the 1980s (Blaz, 2006). Carol Ann Tomlinson (1995), a highly popular and influential researcher of gifted education, defined the term thusly:

At its most basic level, differentiating instruction means “shaking up” what goes on in the classroom so that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn. In other words, a differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products. (p. 3)

The actual process of differentiating instruction for gifted students in the regular classroom is also nothing new. In the very first article published in the *Roeper Review*, J.D. Mulhern (1978) discussed this topic. However, the fact that research has been continually published on this subject for over thirty years implies that gifted students in regular classrooms are still not getting the support they need to reach their potential academically.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Rationale

Today's teacher is faced with the challenges of providing appropriate instructional support to all students; meeting standardized testing goals; and making instruction as interesting and student-interactive as it is informative. These professionals have limited time for research on differentiation-instructional techniques, and while teachers strive to plan well, many unplanned differentiated, spontaneous mini-lessons occur in the classroom.

A Quick Reference Guide for Teachers offers pre-service and in-service teachers a way to more efficiently examine research, strategies, and resources available for differentiating instruction of gifted students in the regular classroom. By not only listing these valuable sources but also analyzing them and discussing their contents all in one document, teachers will save time in their search for strategies to challenge gifted learners. Furthermore, those educators will also be assured that the methods included within this thesis are research-based, a requirement for use in the classroom. While it is not intended to be all-inclusive, it is the researcher's hope that educators will find this guide to be a useful, professional resource.

Focus of Research

This project focused on the following questions:

1. What practical resources and strategies are available for gifted students in the regular classroom?
2. What do these resources suggest teachers do to differentiate processes for gifted students in traditional classrooms?

Participants

Due to the nature of the research project, human experimentation was not required. This project did not test out any new methods or theories on students, and therefore, did not require the approval of the Internal Review Board.

Materials

Journals, articles, books and/or technology-based resources about differentiating education for gifted students in the regular classroom were analyzed in this project. There was an emphasis on journal articles and books, which, in turn, mentioned technology-based resources as a means of differentiation.

Procedure

The researcher began the selection process by performing several keyword searches of the ERIC and Academic Search Premier databases, via EBSCOhost, for scholarly sources featuring the terms *differentiation*, *gifted students*, and *regular classroom*. From the results that were generated, the researcher selected the texts that most closely matched the needs for this particular study. Specifically, the researcher (a) chose texts that discussed the means by which teachers could differentiate instruction for gifted students in the regular classroom; and, (b) the researcher selected texts that were supported and justified by research-based studies and procedures. If the text did not contain practical suggestions for regular classroom teachers, it was deemed ineligible for inclusion in this project.

The researcher then analyzed each of the chosen resources, noting the suggestions made for effective differentiation of instruction for gifted learners in the regular classroom as well any educational resources, whether free or for purchase, mentioned.

Approximately thirty resources were initially identified as useful due to their keywords; upon closer examination, those thirty were culled to sixteen, based upon their content. Only twelve of the initially identified resources were included in this project after extensive examination. Finally, the researcher reported her findings in the form of a thesis, including a graphic organizer of the results. The ultimate goal for this project is to have it published as a quick reference guide for teachers.

Ethical Considerations

All materials were cited accordingly. The nature of this study imposed no risk to human subjects.

Anticipated Limitations

Due to the magnitude of material available on the subject of differentiation in the regular classroom, not every resource on the topic was examined. The resources that were used were also subject to the researcher's judgment of practicality; that is, they were chosen qualitatively based upon their content as described in the Procedures section above.

Improving Performance for Gifted Students in a Cluster Grouping Model

Synopsis

The cluster grouping model, as examined by Brulles, Saunders, and Cohn (2010), is a whole-school means of differentiating instruction to suit the needs of gifted students. Cluster grouping meets the academic needs of these students “with few financial implications to the district” (p. 329). In this model, high-ability students are accommodated thusly:

Students are purposefully placed into classrooms with no classroom having both extremes [below grade level or above grade level] of the learning continuum. The [cluster grouping] model slightly narrows the ranges of abilities in each classroom. This practice allows for a grade-level team approach and encourages grade-level planning and flexible grouping and facilitates more effective instruction. (p. 330)

The strong emphases on professional development and teacher participation are what made the cluster-grouping model in this study so successful. Students in cluster-grouped classrooms outperformed their peers who were in non-cluster-grouped classrooms, where the range of student abilities was much wider and there was less professional development for the teachers (p. 328-329).

Practical Usage

Though the cluster grouping model in this study was a district-wide initiative, the same principles could be applied on a smaller scale – namely, the traditional, inclusive classroom. Following the advice of Brulles, Saunders, and Cohn, teachers could group their students by ability, allowing for better differentiation in small groups. For example, gifted students could work on more challenging assignments in their small group, thus building upon their knowledge of a given concept, while learners who were having difficulty with that concept in the same unit received further assistance. Teachers who

value all students as individuals and create an accepting environment in which to learn will likely have the most success with this strategy. With all these suggestions considered, cluster grouping is a viable option for differentiation for gifted students in the regular classroom.

Educational Resources Mentioned

There were no specific resources mentioned in the article. However, per the authors' recommendations (p. 348), teachers should take advantage of any professional development opportunities on the subject of cluster and/or ability grouping in order to most successfully implement cluster grouping as a means of differentiating instruction for gifted students.

Teaching the Gifted in an Inclusion Classroom: Activities that Work

Synopsis

Ms. Callard-Szulgit's book of strategies for use in the regular classroom is an invaluable resource for teachers hoping to provide differentiation for their gifted students. She offers her opinion on the options available to regular classroom teachers and, as the title promises, provides a plethora of activities to try. Callard-Szulgit also gives tips for teachers to accompany the activities within her book.

Practical Usage

Callard-Szulgit provides the benefits and, in some cases, the shortcomings of the activities within this handbook. She also supplies examples of some of those same activities, and the anecdotal format of the examples makes the work easy to read and follow. It should also be noted that Ms. Callard-Szulgit has a great deal of teaching experience to her credit, both at the elementary and university levels, and that the activities listed within her book have been used successfully in a typical classroom setting. Educators should, as always, modify these activities and/or approaches when using them in their own classrooms to best suit their students.

Educational Resources Mentioned

There are numerous resources discussed in *Teaching the Gifted in an Inclusion Classroom: Activities that Work*. Some are software based, like Accelerated Reader, and some are in the form of lesson plans. One activity was even born from a thought-provoking movie (p. 26). The sheer variety of ideas in this handbook makes it an excellent resource for both pre-service and in-service teachers to have on hand.

Deferential Differentiation: What Types of Differentiation do Students Want?

Synopsis

Inspired by one of her most perceptive students, Lannie Kanevsky (2011) set out to determine what types of differentiation gifted students preferred by asking for their input. Through her surveys, she discovered that “self-pacing, choice of topic, and choice of workmates were most popular” among the students who participated (p. 279). The students in her sample group also “wanted to learn about complex, extracurricular topics and authentic, sophisticated knowledge and interconnections among ideas; to work with others some of the time; and to choose the format of the products of their learning” (p. 279). In short, these students generally liked being able to study topics of interest to them and to report their findings in the format of their choosing.

Practical Usage

Following Kanevsky’s lead, teachers with students identified as gifted can ask their students what types of projects and assignments they would like to work on and how they like to learn, if the latter has not already been discussed with the rest of the class. While this would undoubtedly require extra planning and flexibility, the benefits of using students’ preferred activities are worth the effort. The means by which teachers gather the necessary information from their students may vary. Some might prefer to have students write down their preferences, while others may choose to speak with the students one-on-one about their learning. Regardless of the method, taking the time to find out what students want would be beneficial to teacher and student alike.

Educational Resources Mentioned

No specific resources for differentiation of education were mentioned in this article. However, teachers might find interest inventories or pre-made surveys to be helpful for organizing their students' input on differentiation.

Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Education Elementary Classroom Through Differentiated Instruction

Synopsis

In a research study of similar interest, Brittany Launder (2011) examined the means by which regular classroom teachers differentiate instruction for their high-ability students. The primary method of differentiation used was the independent study, in which the gifted student selects a topic of interest to him-/herself and with the guidance and support of the teacher, researches and reports on that topic. Per Launder's findings, "the independent study is a feasible option for gifted students and has been implemented in the regular education classroom" (p. 56). She adds, "However, the independent study cannot be assumed to be the only, or even the best, option for every gifted student in every classroom. Other options such as acceleration, curriculum compacting, and the use of enrichment clusters are offered in research" (p. 59).

Practical Usage

Launder recommends that teachers "first familiarize themselves with the research using independent studies in the classroom" (p. 56). By consulting guides like this one, the resources within this study, and the numerous sources cited by each of the selected resources in this study, teachers can do exactly that. In the interest of time and efficiency, though, it would likely be better for educators to consult only one or two comprehensive sources on the subject of independent studies.

Educational Resources Mentioned

No specific educational resources were mentioned in this study.

The 2-5-8 Plan: Reaching All Children Through Differentiated Assessment

Synopsis

In the course of the school year, there will be times when all students will need to be exposed to the same content simultaneously, regardless of their varying ability levels. In these instances, Laura Magner (2005) provides a solution to ensure that students are appropriately supported in their learning: “If the content is the same, then the assessment may be differentiated” (para. 3). She offers a solution, dubbed the 2-5-8 Plan. Various assignments that assess a given skill are assigned a point value of 2, 5, or 8, depending on the difficulty of the assignment according to Bloom’s Taxonomy. This system allows students to have choices while ensuring that all are focused on the same concepts at the same time.

Practical Usage

To use a 2-5-8 plan in the classroom, teachers would need to create assignments for the unit, or give existing assignments a point value. Each category should, ideally, have at least three options for students to choose from. Students may choose assignments whose point values add up to 10, but they may not choose to complete five 2-level assignments. To grade these assignments, teachers may decide to assign a base-ten percentage value to the categories (so that 2=20%, 5=50%, etc.). However, Magner “recommend[s] using a rubric to score the assessments” (para. 14), since doing so provides clearer expectations for the students to follow.

Educational Resources Mentioned

The 2-5-8 Plan is a resource in and of itself. Teachers could also incorporate a large variety of resources, both digital and paper-based, by assigning them appropriate point values according to the 2-5-8 guidelines.

Valuing the Advanced Learner: Differentiating Up

Synopsis

Manning, Stanford, and Reeves (2010) offer more than just means to differentiate curricula for gifted students in the regular classroom. In addition, they provide sound reasoning for doing so and address qualms that teachers may have about differentiation. For example, “All children, including advanced learners, should have the opportunity to be challenged and to excel in their classroom curriculum” succinctly summarizes the rationale for this research project (p. 145), and regarding teachers’ hesitation to differentiate curriculum:

Teachers worry that by differentiating, they will make more work for themselves. Initially, this belief is probably true. Learning to differentiate is like learning to ride a bicycle or use a laptop. Extra time needs to be invested in the beginning, and frustrations as one learns are inevitable. However, once that initial period is over, one’s life is much easier and more interesting. (p. 147)

The combination of practical advice and the amount of differentiation techniques within the article make it an excellent starting point for teachers who seek to challenge all of their students.

Practical Usage

Firstly, to properly differentiate instruction, “one must know his or her learners” (p. 147). The use of interest inventories and learning styles inventories is recommended as a starting point in getting to know students. Determining the students’ strengths and weaknesses is the first step towards differentiating curricula for these students (p. 147). Once this has been done, further means of differentiation can occur. These include but are not limited to curriculum compacting, project-based learning, problem-based learning, and content acceleration. Teachers are advised to keep tabs on student progress by using informal assessments: “Informal assessments lead to frequent updates on how students

are progressing toward their goals and help the teacher make curriculum-based decisions on lesson modification, reteaching concepts, and topic restructuring” (p. 148). Formal assessments need not be limited to tests and quizzes, either. The use of contests to assess student learning is recommended. They “are available in hundreds of areas, from building bridges to writing poetry” and “provide an outstanding way to match teacher and student talents with exciting outlets” (p. 148). From teaching content to assessing understanding, differentiation for gifted learners takes many forms.

Educational Resources Mentioned

While no resources are mentioned by name, interested parties should take time to research contests in the subject area of their choice. The authors also note that “many projects and independent studies are available in every area of interest,” something that teachers should be aware of when differentiating instruction for gifted students in the regular classroom (p. 148).

Lift the Ceiling: Increase Rigor with Critical Thinking Skills

Synopsis

McCollister and Sayler (2010) make their case for differentiating instruction by increasing the focus on developing critical thinking skills. They list four main ways in which to develop these skills: "...problem solving, asking questions that require critical analysis, evaluating sources, and decision making" (p. 42). Encouraging and teaching the use of such critical thinking skills "also helps those students on the normal developmental trajectory as they interrelate ideas within and among the disciplines leading to increased academic rigor and greater depth of understanding..." (p. 42). Therefore, by accommodating the needs of the gifted students in a classroom, teachers can also help average-ability students to excel.

Practical Usage

The authors list four categories of critical thinking development. The first of these is problem solving. Opportunities for students to think logically and, with support, solve challenging problems build critical thinking skills. The second category discussed is questioning. Teaching students how to analyze and answer in-depth questions is one way to develop their critical thinking skills. Evaluating sources is another means by which critical thinking skills are strengthened. As students gather sources on a topic during the research process, they are shown how to evaluate these sources for reliability. This method accompanies independent study projects well. The final means by which critical thinking skills are grown is through decision making. By decision making, the authors are referring to important decisions that require research and analysis to make crucial choices, such as choosing a stance on a political issue or other major opinion.

Educational Resources Mentioned

Throughout the article, McCollister and Sayler (2010) mentioned the use of WebQuests for research. WebQuests are online, interactive, inquiry-based programs authored by teachers and used by students as a means of learning about a specific topic. If a WebQuest on the desired topic is not available, teachers can make their own or guide their students through the WebQuest creation process.

Teach to the Top: How to Keep High Achievers Engaged and Motivated

Synopsis

At first glance, this one page graphic organizer may not seem like much. Upon closer examination, however, it quickly reveals itself to be a handy guide to differentiation of instruction. Written by one of the leading researchers of gifted education, *Teach to the Top* offers concise suggestions for teachers to use in the regular classroom to “keep high achievers engaged and motivated” (p. 34). Quality, not quantity, is absolutely the name of the game here.

Practical Usage

This piece provides seven strategies for teachers to try in their classrooms. They are as follows: Provide open-ended assignments; create opportunities for collaboration; use tiered assignments; let them [gifted students] pursue independent projects; find the right books; consider an accelerated program; and aim for school-wide enrichment. The last two items would require reaching out to personnel beyond the teacher’s classroom, which should be taken into consideration. Finally, as with all instructional strategies, good judgment and a willingness to adapt these methods to a specific set of students would provide the best results.

Educational Resources Mentioned

For more information on cluster grouping and school-wide enrichment programs, Dr. Renzulli directs readers to the website for the University of Connecticut’s National Research Center on the Gifted Talented. For further research on acceleration of high-achieving students, Dr. Renzulli suggests consulting the Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration’s website.

Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom

Synopsis

Not to be confused with a similarly titled article by J.D. Mulhern, this resource provides a list of options for gifted students in the regular classroom. The items listed include what not to do for these students as well as plenty of suggestions for appropriate differentiation. With each suggestion, Shoplik (2004) discusses the benefits of the suggestion and provides cautionary considerations for teachers. Though it is not organized as attractively as Renzulli's (2008) *Teach to the Top*, it is nonetheless a viable resource for teachers who are searching for ways to differentiate instruction for gifted students.

Practical Usage

It is important to note that Shoplik immediately cautions against having gifted students tutor others as a means of differentiation: "Students who tutor others already know the material with which their classmates are struggling...[they] should spend their classroom time learning new material" (par. 1). She also dismisses having students work ahead in their textbooks at their own pace as an option, noting that gifted students "might experience feelings of isolation and probably will not learn the material well or to any great depth" (par. 2). Shoplik echoes the suggestions of other authors and recommends independent study projects, enrichment topics, curriculum compacting, ability grouping, advancing to a higher grade in a given subject, and exploring the existing curriculum material in greater depth.

Educational Resources Mentioned

Shoplik does not recommend any specific educational resources to teachers; however, she does direct readers to a resource written by Susan Winebrenner (2001), an examination of which can be found in this research project.

How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms

Synopsis

Though its focus is not solely on meeting the needs of gifted learners, Tomlinson (2012) provides an excellent guide for differentiating instruction in an inclusion, or mixed-ability, classroom. From the rationale for differentiation to the means to make it happen, Tomlinson discusses virtually all aspects of teaching the same content in different ways to a diverse group of students. It should be noted that, among other methods of differentiation, Tomlinson discusses curriculum compacting, independent study projects, flexible grouping, and tiered assignments as means of differentiating the curriculum.

Practical Usage

While the whole of this book is a recommended read for teachers who desire to know more about how to differentiate instruction, there are portions of the book that are of particular interest to those who desire to know more about differentiating instruction for gifted learners. Chapters 2 and 13, in particular, offer specific references to meeting the needs of this population. Chapter 2 focuses more on the social, emotional, and educational needs of gifted students, while chapter 13 provides suggestions for differentiating products, or assignments, in the regular classroom. For teachers of inclusive classes, these suggestions are invaluable. The only fault of this source is the fact that it does not focus solely on the gifted student population in the regular classroom.

Educational Resources Mentioned

There was no mention of any specific educational resources within this book.

**Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom: Strategies and Techniques
Every Teacher Can Use to Meet the Academic Needs of the Gifted and
Talented**

Synopsis

Touted as the “orange bible” of differentiation for gifted students in the regular classroom, this book is as close to comprehensive as it can possibly get. From discussions on identifying gifted students to supporting their emotional needs to differentiating for different types of giftedness, Susan Winebrinner (2001) provides expert advice and uber-practical step-by-step instructions on how to implement the strategies she lists within. Those who hope to find answers to their questions on the matter of differentiating instruction for gifted students will certainly find assistance in this book.

Practical Usage

As previously mentioned, Winebrinner (2001) covers nearly all topics related to teaching gifted children in the regular classroom in an easy to read, step-by-step format. For the busy teacher, this is perfect. From curriculum compacting to increase certain skills to providing challenging activities students who finish required assignments before their peers, Winebrinner offers assistance for all. Furthermore, *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom* comes with multiple reproducible pages, so making one’s own rubrics, assignment choice menus, and assessments are made simple. *Teaching Gifted Kids* is so full of helpful, practical solutions that it is hard to succinctly describe here.

Educational Resources Mentioned

Each chapter contains a list of resources for further research, and the book features two appendices full of resources for teaching all sorts of subjects. There is no shortage of ideas and products within Winebrinner's book.

Strategies for Individualizing Instruction in Regular Classrooms

Synopsis

The author best summarizes this article – and, in turn, all of the research on the topic of differentiation for gifted students in the regular classroom – thusly:

Providing individualized instruction for gifted students in regular classrooms is not an easy task. It requires redesigning the classroom environment and operating procedures, creating enriched educational experiences, and evaluating in new ways. The cost in energy is high, but the rewards of unlocking human potential and stirring excitement for learning are worth the effort. (p. 45)

With that said, this article does exactly what its title suggests and provides eleven strategies for teachers to use with their high-ability students as well as advice on how to implement the strategies.

Practical Usage

The strategies and principles within are as follows:

1. Making students into partners: This refers to making students partners with the teacher in their learning, not necessarily assigning them a peer partner. This gives the gifted students ownership of their education and requires the teacher to give up a portion of their control of the situation.
2. Curriculum compacting: Pre-testing students on a unit, skill, or learning objective and sorting them into groups according to how much they already know about the subject. Students who demonstrate mastery or near mastery can then move on to an independent project or they can build upon the skills they already have through enrichment activities.

3. Independent projects: Used to allow students to study a topic they have great interest in, independent projects are one way to have students develop skills like researching, reading, writing, presenting, and so on.
4. Assignment choices: When possible, allowing students to choose their assignments encourages ownership of education and boosts interest in those assignments.
5. Students as teachers: This is not the same as having gifted students tutor lower ability peers. Rather, having students as teachers refers to allowing students to investigate a topic of interest and, if willing, teach it to the class or a small group of peers.
6. Multiple novels on a theme: When studying a theme or unit, one way to differentiate for gifted students is to choose novels of varying difficulty on the same topic.
7. Mentors: If a student shows strong interest in a particular subject area, teachers may choose to reach out to people in the community who might be “willing to serve as mentors, in particular retired teachers, hobbyists, and craft-persons” (p. 44). After screening, meetings would be set up, and gifted students “be made responsible for attending the meetings with their mentors” (p. 44).
8. Academic competitions: There are many extracurricular organizations for which gifted students may be eligible, if they show an interest in them.
9. Subject area acceleration: Students who are advanced in one or more subjects specifically might attend a higher grade level class for those subjects. For

example, a student who shows mastery of second grade mathematics may, with permission of relevant faculty, be allowed to take math with a third grade class.

10. Contracts: Contracts are made between students and their teachers, outlining specific goals and ways in which to reach those goals. Contracts may be for an individual or for a group, and it is recommended that they be specific (p. 44).

11. Conferencing: Used primarily for independent projects, conferencing allows teachers to meet with students one-on-one to discuss progress. Conferencing is also a good fit for use with contracts.

Educational Resources Mentioned

No mention of educational resources was made in this article.

Conclusion

Though there are numerous ways to differentiate instruction for gifted students in the regular classroom, several strategies were mentioned multiple times throughout this project. Curriculum compacting, or the process of identifying what students already know and filling in the gaps of their knowledge on a particular subject, is suggested as a means of differentiation by Launder (2011); Manning, Stanford, and Reeves (2010); Tomlinson (2012); Winebrinner (2001); and Willard-Holt (1994). Independent projects, in which gifted students are allowed to create research projects of personal interest to them, were recommended by Launder (2011); Manning, Stanford, and Reeves (2010); McCollister and Sayler (2010); Renzulli (2008); Shoplik (2004); Tomlinson (2012); and Willard-Holt (1994). Yet another popular suggestion was to get to know gifted students through communicating with them regularly. All of the authors cited in this project recommended doing so in some capacity.

These most popular suggestions for differentiating instruction for gifted students in the regular classroom were likely so popular because of their feasibility. Curriculum compacting, independent projects, and communication between teachers and students cost little to nothing to set up, and yet they are touted by the majority of the authors as effective means of differentiation. Therefore, though there are a multitude of strategies available to regular classroom teachers, these three are recommended as the first steps to take towards meeting the needs of gifted learners in the regular classroom.

While not as commonplace as the aforementioned approaches to differentiation, the most innovatory of the recommended strategies is the 2-5-8 plan devised by Laura Magner (2005). The idea of differentiating assessments is not a groundbreaking one;

however, Magner actually developed a system for doing so. Moreover, her system is generic enough to be used with any content in any subject area, making it so very unlike the other approaches to differentiation.

The following page features a chart that outlines all of the articles in this thesis and the approaches to differentiating instruction for gifted students in the regular classroom that the articles bring to the forefront and discuss. A key is provided for easy identification of the articles in order to speed the process of searching for a specific approach. The chart simply reiterates the findings that were mentioned earlier in the conclusion, but presents them in a visual way to increase the practicality of this thesis.

Figure 1 – Key of sources' titles and corresponding numbers (for use with Figure 2)

1	Improving Performance for Gifted Students in a Cluster Grouping Model
2	Teaching the Gifted in an Inclusion Classroom: Activities that Work
3	Deferential Differentiation: What Types of Differentiation do Students Want?
4	Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Education Elementary Classroom Through Differentiated Instruction
5	The 2-5-8 Plan: Reaching All Children Through Differentiated Assessment
6	Valuing the Advanced Learner: Differentiating Up
7	Lift the Ceiling: Increase Rigor with Critical Thinking Skills
8	Teach to the Top: How to Keep High Achievers Engaged and Motivated
9	Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom
10	How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms
11	Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom: Strategies and Techniques Every Teacher Can Use to Meet the Academic Needs of the Gifted and Talented
12	Strategies for Individualizing Instruction in Regular Classrooms

Figure 2 – Approaches to differentiated instruction and the sources that discuss them

	Curriculum Compacting	Grouping	Independent Projects	Assignment Choice	Communicating with Students	Acceleration in at least 1 subject	Tiered Assignments	Other
1		✓			✓			
2					✓			✓
3					✓			
4			✓		✓			
5					✓			✓
6	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
7					✓			✓
8		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
9	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
10	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
11	✓	✓			✓			
12	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓

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