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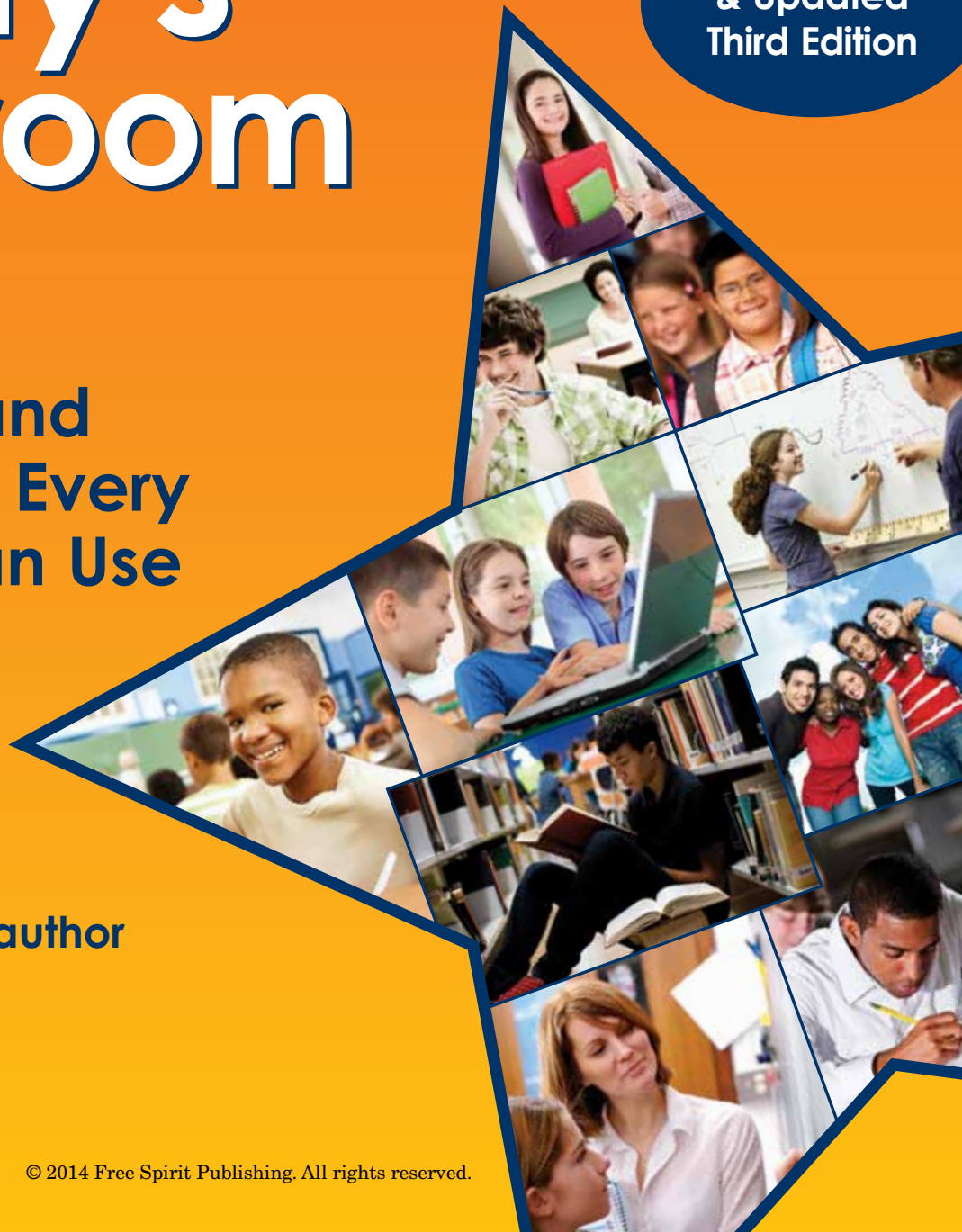
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# TEACHING Gifted Kids IN Today's Classroom

Revised  
& Updated  
Third Edition

Strategies and  
Techniques Every  
Teacher Can Use



with contributing author  
Dina Brulles, Ph.D.

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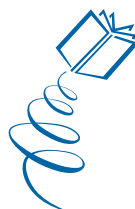
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Every Teacher Can Use**

**Susan Winebrenner, M.S.,  
with contributing author Dina Brulles, Ph.D.**

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PUBLISHING®



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## Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the educators who have found its previous editions so helpful, and who have consistently spread the word to colleagues far and wide. We are forever in your debt!

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And last, but certainly not least, to Susan's husband, Joe, whose amazing patience with the demands of this most time-consuming task surely demonstrates how fortunate she is to share her life with him.

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# Foreword

by Bertie Kingore, Ph.D.

Is the word “classic” overused? Not when referencing this book. *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom* (its original title) is a true classic in gifted education. Susan Winebrenner’s first and second editions transformed how gifted children are perceived and nurtured in mixed-ability classrooms. At the university level, both my undergraduate and graduate in-service teachers were enriched by the content and spirit of this book and perceived immediate connections that influenced their interactions with gifted students.

Now, with Dina Brulles, the impact continues with a third edition: *Teaching Gifted Kids in Today’s Classroom*. The title change is most appropriate, as this work explores applications in contemporary education and more authentic learning initiatives, including the changes implied by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that are integrated throughout the book.

This third edition continues the tradition of excellence with updated content, new topics, expanded resources, and the addition of Dr. Brulles’s field experience and research in school systems. The book is a pleasure to read. It is well-crafted with practical applications that demonstrate how to address the two crucial needs of gifted students: compacting and differentiation. The discussion and applications of curriculum compacting and differentiation techniques are succinct, clear, and absolutely manageable—the best available to teachers. Compacting is particularly crucial for gifted students to enable them to experience continuous learning and avoid the less meaningful repetition of known concepts and skills.

The added chapter and expanded emphasis on assessment and technology is timely and sorely needed. The authors build a solid case for effectively combining the two for increased interest and achievement outcomes. They provide numerous, ready-to-use formative assessment techniques in keeping with the CCSS and the increased emphasis on continual assessments by most schools. Educators must use preassessment and formative assessment to document that gifted students have changed as learners as a result of classroom learning. Assessment is also vital to ensure that gifted students experience continuous progress in all content areas.

The authors provide a useful and unthreatening set of technology techniques and sample lessons for the classroom. Their choices encourage teachers who are less “techie” than their students to embrace the benefits of technology, while teaching students to be smart Internet researchers who understand how to evaluate websites.

In the current educational forum, there are very few guarantees. But Susan Winebrenner and Dina Brulles have provided us strategies and procedures that guarantee effectiveness. There is a good reason why this book has been in continuous publication since 1992: It is a definitive book on teaching gifted kids, and we need it in today’s classrooms.

*Bertie Kingore, Ph.D.*



# Introduction

Of all the students you are teaching in a given class, which group do you think will probably learn the least this year? It may surprise you to find that in a class that has a range of abilities (and which class doesn't?), it is the *most* able, rather than the least able, who will make the smallest amount of academic progress. These are the students who are almost never given an opportunity to demonstrate that they already know what is going to be taught.

How does this happen? Mostly it's because each year we are presented with our curriculum content and feel intense pressure and responsibility to teach all the standards assigned to our grade or subject to all of our students. For advanced learners, this creates a situation in which much of their school time is wasted on grade-level work they have already mastered.

As adults, we often have options when we find ourselves in a situation like this. We can leave the class, lecture, or presentation and seek an alternative way to spend that time with something more satisfying and productive. Students do not often get that choice. To some extent, they are confined within a system that will not let them move ahead until they first complete all the grade-level requirements. The frustration faced by these students can be agonizing and maddening, and their wasted time and energy a tragedy.

For example, when a student was interviewed by a national researcher and was asked what it was like to be a gifted student in a heterogeneous classroom, he said it felt like his teacher was "stealing" his learning time by making him sit through so many lessons he already knew.

Can you identify with this student's frustration, impatience, and resentment? Think of the last time you *didn't* have the option to leave a redundant meeting or lecture and were instead forced to sit through it. And vow that now as a

teacher you will avoid imposing such a fate on your gifted students.

How can you avoid this? You might want to hold on to something before you read the next sentence. *You are not required to teach all the standards to all of your students.* You are only required to document that the standards assigned to you have been mastered by the students assigned to you. Some of your students are gifted, or very advanced, and they may already know much of what you are planning to teach, or they can often learn new material in much less time than their age peers.

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You are not required to teach all the standards to all of your students. You are *only* required to document that the standards assigned to you have been mastered by the students assigned to you.

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Students are recognized as gifted if they have exceptional abilities in any area of learning that significantly exceed grade-level expectations, and they can understand content designed for students older than them by about two years or more. Since grade-level standards are designed for grade-level learners of a certain age, grade-level curriculum cannot, by definition, be at the instructional level of gifted students. This is essential to understand if we are to ensure that gifted students actually learn something new and challenging every day in school. All other students have that experience daily, so why shouldn't gifted students also enjoy it? As long as mastery is documented, students may experience any of the challenging learning options described in this book.

## “But It’s Too Hard!”

The United States is struggling to maintain a leadership role in the world. One reason is that in the United States we have been unable to provide enough candidates for high-level math and science courses and, consequently, for jobs in technology, science, and engineering. This is not because we lack students who are gifted in math and science. It is because these students often rebel from the tedium of spending so much time being taught what they’ve already learned that they likely come to assume that if someone is gifted, he or she must just “know” what is required without having to work hard to learn it. Hence, it is understandable that by the time these kids have an opportunity to take advanced courses, they are out of practice at working hard and may have lost the courage to put forth effort without the promise of easy success. When asked why they opt not to take advanced math courses in high school, for example, a common response from students is simply, “Because it’s too *hard!*” This—from some of the smartest kids in the country.

The research of Dr. Carol Dweck at Stanford University validates these ideas. Her study, described in Chapter 1 of this book (see page 18), demonstrates that in order for students to be motivated to progress to advanced and challenging levels of learning, they must have the mindset that hard work is absolutely necessary for learning success and the perception that effort is the key factor to seeking new challenges throughout one’s lifetime. They must believe, from their own experience, that smart people can work very hard—and even struggle, sweat, and fail sometimes—and *still* be considered smart and gifted. In short, when gifted students discover early on that they can get high praise and grades for tasks they complete with little or no effort, they may conclude that being gifted means being able to do things without really trying. And the longer they are allowed to believe this, the harder it is for them to rise to the challenge when one is finally encountered.

We should be seriously concerned about the plight of gifted students in most classrooms today.

Many consistently bring home perfect report cards and sail from grade school through high school, graduating in the top five percent of their class, while rarely being required to work hard. When they are accepted into prestigious colleges and universities, where everyone in the freshman class was *also* in the top five percent of their high school graduating class, the competition for A’s is fierce and learning requires a lot of time, effort, and intensive study skills. Many gifted students have never learned these skills and are at a loss about how to effectively study, manage their time, handle intense competition and pressure, or deal with less-than-stellar grades and test scores—all of which can lead to a sense of discouragement, severe anxiety, eating disorders, depression, and other harmful outcomes.

Where do we want these kids we care about to be when they realize that success is not always easy and that it is perfectly natural for all students to have to work hard in order to learn new things? Surely not alone in a freshman dorm, miles away from home. We want them to experience challenges in their local school environment, so we can help them celebrate their first B and demonstrate that life goes on—and often improves!—even when one’s grades are not perfect.

One fourth-grade teacher who attended a gifted workshop series Susan presented had an eye-opening experience that you may relate to. She started thinking about how happy she had felt the day before, when all of her most capable readers got A’s on the end-of-the-unit test. But then she wondered whether their grades reflected what they had actually learned from her. Was it possible that these students knew the material before the unit even began?

Since there were two weeks between each workshop, she decided to find the answer to her question. The next day, with no advance warning, she gave these same students the end-of-the-unit test for the following unit. They were tested on the skills and the vocabulary only, not on the content of the stories, which they had not yet read. Again, they all got A’s. This experience was one of the most startling of the teacher’s career. She began to consider alternate methods of teaching

her most capable readers to make sure they were not simply going through the motions of learning, but they were making measurable forward progress.

When gifted students realize that they already know a lot of the subject matter, they usually have little choice but to dutifully go through the assigned curriculum, waiting and hoping for the rare times when there will be something new or challenging for them to learn. Since very few teacher training programs require candidates to take even one course in gifted education, you are not to blame as a teacher for not knowing how to handle this situation effectively. We are confident that this book will help you teach gifted students in ways that can empower them for a lifetime of challenge, hard work, and achievement.

Author and educator Dr. Sylvia Rimm has expressed this eloquently when she says: “The surest path to high self-esteem is to be successful at something you perceived would be difficult.” It is therefore possible that each time we take away students’ opportunity to struggle by insisting they do work that is too easy for them, we steal their opportunity to have an esteem-building experience. Unless kids are consistently engaged in challenging work, they will lose their motivation to work hard.

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A related self-esteem issue is that, especially in grades preK–8, students’ self-esteem is usually a goal of the school. When atypical learners conclude that their specific learning needs are not being attended to, they may worry that other students and even teachers do not approve of them the way they are and wish they were more “average” or “normal.” There are few challenges to one’s self-esteem as painful as knowing you have to try to hide your real self on a daily basis. Many gifted students realize from an early age that it is safer for them to pretend to be average than to demonstrate their exceptional learning abilities.

This leads to serious disenfranchisement issues. However, this entire situation is fixed when their teachers provide appropriate compacting and differentiation opportunities daily in their classes for students who need them. Gifted students interpret these options as evidence that it is okay to be themselves. Their classmates come to the same conclusion and are more likely to follow the teacher’s example and demonstrate acceptance behaviors toward any students with significant learning differences.

## Why Gifted Students Need Differentiation

Many teachers believe there is no need to do anything special for gifted kids. “After all,” they reason, “most gifted students get good grades and high scores on standardized tests. They do just fine without extra help or attention. They will ‘make it’ on their own.” To understand why this is *not* the case, let’s look at the bell curve on page 4. Rest assured that we use this model only to demonstrate reasons why differentiating for gifted students is required as much as it is for students who are struggling.

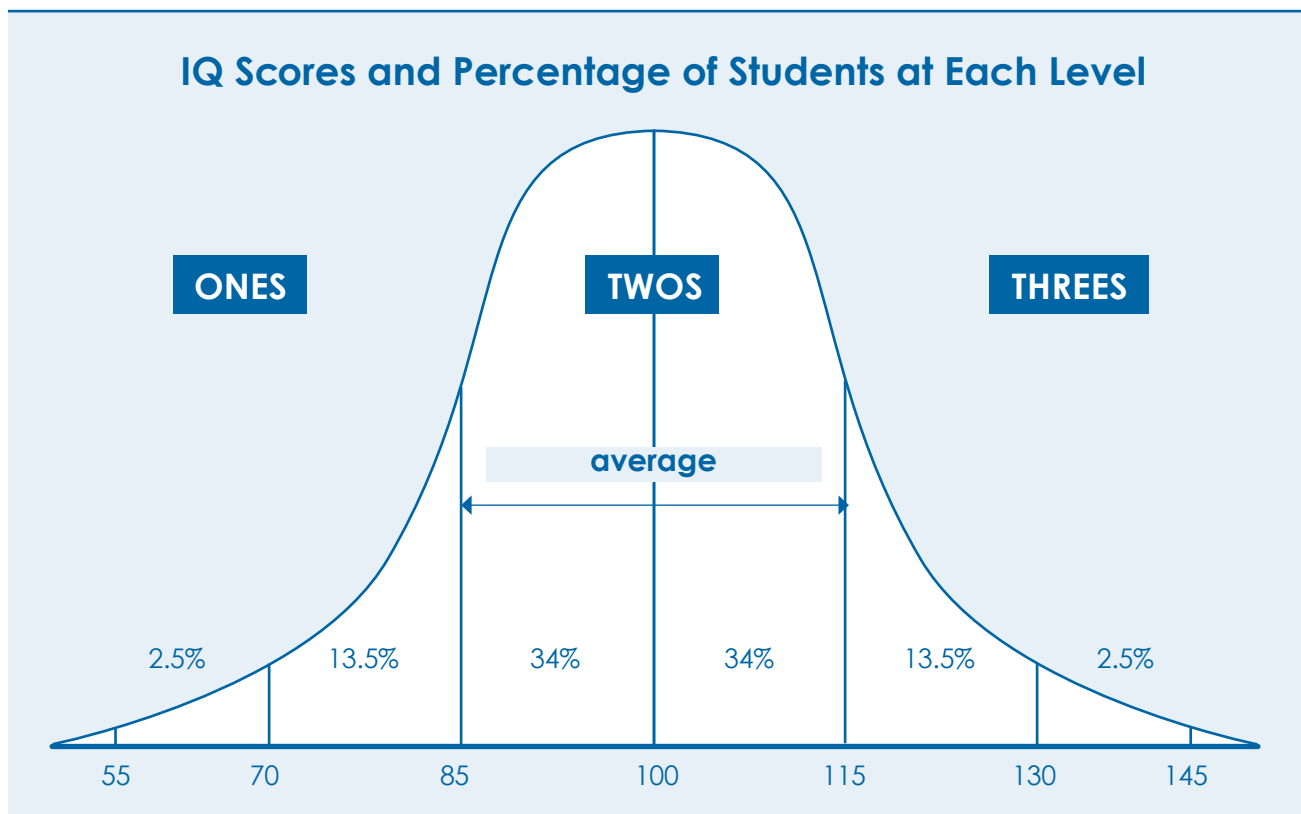
When we teach a class of students, we usually differentiate content, pacing, amount of work, and activities based on what we know about typical students at that age. Let’s call those kids the Twos, because they are in the middle of the three groups represented on the bell curve and are usually students of average abilities. Many students enter a grade level missing many of the basic competencies they were supposed to acquire in earlier grades. They are often children with learning differences or special needs, or children of poverty, and may have lacked the early learning experiences that prepare kids for kindergarten. These kids are far to the left on the bell curve; let’s call them the Ones. These children are described as students with exceptional educational needs because they are not typical learners, nor do their abilities and performance fall into the middle range of the bell curve.

We also have some students who are ahead of their age peers in what they know and can do. We'll call them the Threes. On the bell curve, the Threes are the same distance to the far right as the Ones are to the far left. Hence, they can also be described as students with exceptional educational needs. Therefore, they are entitled to all the same differentiation opportunities our system makes available for the Ones—not because the Threes are specially privileged, but because they are *equally as atypical in their learning needs*.

Now ask yourself, “What do I do differently for students who are having trouble keeping up with the grade-level standards (the Ones)?” Your answer might include these interventions:

- **Adjust the amount of work** they have to do. You may require them to do less work than the typical learner for equivalent credit.
- **Change the pacing of the lesson** and adjust the amount of time they have to work. You might slow down your rate of instruction or provide more time for them to complete their work.

- **Change the content** in order to teach them what they are missing. If they are missing material they were supposed to master in a previous grade, you provide learning time on standards from other grade levels even though they are not part of your assigned standards.
- **Teach to their learning modalities and preferences**, and allow students to express what they have learned in ways that are compatible with those modalities.
- **Find topics in which they are highly interested**, so you can entice them to learn some of the standards through those high-interest topics.
- **Change the peer interactions** they have with their classmates, taking special care to pair them with students who can support them and with whom they can work comfortably.
- **Seek out their parents and former teachers** to get information that might empower you to help them learn more successfully. You may even invite their parents to come



to school beyond the regular conference times, because you know that these students' achievement often improves with parental interest and assistance.

Many of us make most or all of these adjustments daily for the benefit of the Ones in our classes. Do you feel that these adjustments are unnecessary or unfair to the other students? Do you refrain from making them because of the extra work that is required of you? Probably not.

Just like the Ones, the Threes on the other end of the bell curve are deserving of differentiated instruction and interventions. Not because they are gifted, but because, like the Ones, they are not average. The level, pacing, amount of work, and type of learning activities that benefit average learners are just as inappropriate for above-average learners as they are for students who are working below grade-level expectations. For the Threes, the following adjustments are often necessary to improve their attitudes and willingness to do their schoolwork:

- **Lessen the amount of grade-level work** they must do because they can demonstrate mastery with less practice.
- **Increase the pace of a lesson** and allow them to spend considerable class time working on extensions or independent study.
- **Adjust the content** so it extends beyond the grade-level parameters, fuels students' passion for learning all they can about an interesting topic, and gives them opportunities for acceleration as part of their regular school experience.
- **Allow them to work with each other** on extension tasks and limit our expectations for them to assist other students who need help.
- **Change our style of interaction with them** from being a provider of information, or "sage on the stage," to being a learning "guide on the side."
- **Welcome their parents as important partners** in their learning. After all, every adult's goal for his or her kids is the same—for kids

to love school and love learning for the rest of their lives.

## Building Lifelong Learners

Becoming an enthusiastic lifelong learner is, arguably, the most important goal for success in the 21st century. Many experts predict that all the students we currently teach will be required throughout their work lives to change careers numerous times before they retire, due to economic situations and advances in technology. Thus, many students will need to go back to some sort of schooling to be retrained for another career. In order for them to welcome that reality, they must have had positive experiences in school when they were young.

Look again at the bell curve on page 4. Which two groups of students do you predict are the *least* likely to be happy about returning to school later in life? If you predicted the Ones and the Threes, you would be correct. Why? Because school for many of them was stressful most of the time. The Twos usually have more positive experiences because much of what happens in school is geared toward them, the typical learners. The Ones feel stressed to meet standards and pass tests, while the Threes feel frustrated about feeling unchallenged so often in school.

## Gifted Education Techniques Benefit Everyone

When students have had access to gifted education, it has significantly improved learning experiences for all students in heterogeneous classes. Every pedagogical method we've used with gifted kids over the years is now considered state-of-the-art for all kids. Project work, meaningful student choice, self-directed learning, literature-based reading, inquiry, and problem-based learning—all were born in gifted education practices. Even the Common Core State Standards in math and English, now widely adopted and deemed necessary for all students' success in college and careers, require "rigorous

content and application of knowledge through high-order skills.” Rigor and conceptual thinking have long been a focus of gifted education strategies and techniques.

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The Common Core State Standards require “rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills.” This has long been a focus of gifted education strategies and techniques.

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When we provide what gifted kids need—namely, a consistently challenging curriculum—other students are likely to benefit as well. Teachers who are trained for cluster classes learn that the differentiation opportunities are always offered to all students—not just those formally identified as gifted. This practice demonstrates high expectations for all students and most students react very positively to those expectations.

## What Gifted Students Need

A good definition of learning might be “forward progress from a student’s entry level at the beginning of each school year to her or his achievement levels at the end of the school year.” So what do gifted students need in order to learn? They need two crucial things: *compacting* and *differentiation*. Compacting means condensing a semester’s or year’s worth of learning into a shorter time period. Differentiation means providing students with different materials, tasks, and activities than their age peers—tasks that lead to authentic learning for them. Both compacting and differentiation can be used to tailor learning for gifted students in the following five areas: *content*, *process*, *product*, *environment*, and *assessment*.

**1. Content.** As a teacher, you are responsible for making sure that all kids learn the content standards they are expected to know. Students who demonstrate that they have already learned some of the content, or who

are able to learn required content in much less time than their age peers, should be provided with differentiated content.

Content is differentiated through the use of curriculum compacting, learning contracts, accelerated pacing, learning centers, flexible grouping, advanced resource materials, independent study, and mentorships. The focus of differentiated content should be on students attaining a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the issues and viewpoints connected to a specific topic.

**2. Process.** This defines the methods students use to make sense of concepts, generalizations, and the required learning standards. It encompasses learning modality considerations, creative and productive thinking and conceptualizing, focus on open-ended and problem-solving tasks, opportunities for meaningful research, and the skills to share what they are learning.

Gifted students should spend most of their learning time using learning processes that are more complex and abstract than is suitable for their age peers. They should collect and analyze knowledge and data as though they are professionals in a given field, assuming an attitude of inquiry rather than one of information gathering. And they should be expected to support their findings with valid evidence.

Process is differentiated through the use of flexible grouping, approaches based on learning modalities or multiple intelligences, opportunities for learning at more complex levels, sophisticated research practices, and adjustable time limits.

**3. Product.** This describes the ways in which students choose to demonstrate their understanding of the content and process. Some gifted students resist assignments that require a written product, as their brains may move much faster than their hands. They may be more willing to produce a unique artifact, exhibit, independent study, or performance. Gifted students should be guided to produce what Dr. Joseph Renzulli



calls “real-life products for appropriate audiences.” These go beyond the typical research papers or reports to include alternatives that develop individual students’ talents and curiosities.

Product is differentiated by steering students to exciting and unusual resources and to people who can help them mine and use them, and by encouraging students to use available technology to its best advantage.

4. **Environment.** This describes the physical setting where learning takes place, as well as the expectations and attitudes present in the classroom and other learning locales. Gifted students typically spend more time in independent study than their classmates, and they sometimes may work outside the classroom or school as part of their differentiated learning. They thrive in a challenging atmosphere in which individuality is valued and nurtured.

Learning environment is also differentiated by adjusting your expectations as a teacher to require higher level responses to more challenging lessons, establishing a positive attitude toward individual differences, allowing flexible time limits, providing opportunities for in-depth research, and arranging mentorships.

5. **Assessment.** Assessment practices have changed dramatically. They now are coming much closer to the attributes of assessment we have always used with gifted students. Gifted learners should experience consistent opportunities to demonstrate previous mastery before a particular unit is taught or to experience differentiated pacing. They should be encouraged to develop their own scoring rubrics and other methods to assess their independent study projects. We should strive to be certain that the manner in which we set up the assessments for their advanced work avoids simple extrinsic reward systems such as special stickers or extra credit. When we do that, students are working for the points or grades, rather than the intrinsic desire to learn all they

can about a particular topic. To quote Karen Brown, a highly effective teacher of the gifted, “It’s not just about the grades, it’s about the *learning*.” In a perfect world, that should be the goal for all students and teachers.

Assessment is differentiated for advanced learners by setting up classroom conditions that allow them to get full credit for required standards without necessarily being expected to do all the activities that have been designed to lead to mastery.

We understand the uncertainty, and even fear, you might be feeling as you contemplate the tasks of finding out what your gifted students already know, giving them credit for it before you teach it, and providing alternate activities for them to work on instead. You may be asking yourself, “How will I gather the materials and resources I need? Won’t differentiating content, process, product, environment, and assessment take a lot of time and add more to my teaching load? Will I lose control of my classroom?” We assure you this book will ease your doubts and fears and make your efforts to teach your gifted students—and consequently *all* your students—more successful and rewarding. As in all new learning, you will be less stressed if you choose one strategy to use in one subject area, and concentrate on that until you and your students have reached a comfort level. At that time, you might choose to use the same strategy with another subject area or try out another strategy in the same subject area. The catchphrase is “*start slowly*,” as you build toward successful implementation of several strategies from this book.

## About This Book and Digital Content

Formerly titled *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom*, this book has been in constant publication since 1992, during which time hundreds of thousands of educators have shared, discussed, dog-eared, highlighted, and, most importantly, *used* it. The feedback from teachers,

administrators, and parents has been dramatically positive and readers often state, “I wish I would have known the things in this book years ago—I might have avoided a lot of heartache and frustration for myself and the gifted kids I have taught and parented.” No guilt intended! Simply begin today to make your own forward progress in your quest to have gifted students (and their parents) feel happy that you are their teacher.

In creating this third edition, we chose a slightly different title to more clearly state its mission: *Teaching Gifted Kids in Today's Classroom*. It's a guide written for educators of gifted kids in all grades, kindergarten through high school, in a variety of present-day learning environments—be they “regular” classrooms, gifted cluster classes, full-time gifted classes, school- or district-wide gifted programs, or at home. The design has undergone a complete face-lift, and extensive content has been updated, revised, and added to such topics as technology and assessment to make the book resonate with current teaching and learning realities.

Each chapter presents proven, practical, easy-to-use teaching and classroom management strategies, which are listed in a box at the start of each chapter. These strategies have been used by many teachers for over more than two decades. Scenarios profile students with whom the strategies have been successfully used, so you'll be able to draw parallels to the characteristics, needs, and responses of your own students. The strategies are described in step-by-step detail, frequently asked questions about the strategies are answered, and chapter summaries review the main points of each chapter. Of course, you are free to adjust any of the strategies as you use them as long as you never lose sight of these students' critical need for consistent compacting and differentiation that are essential parts of their total school program. The references and resources for all chapters appear together at the end of the book, listed by chapter.

**Chapter 1** describes the learning and behavioral characteristics of gifted students. Special attention is given to populations that have been underserved in the past, including young gifted children, nonproductive students, gifted students from multicultural and low socioeconomic

populations, and those considered “twice-exceptional” (possessing both gifted abilities and learning challenges). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the qualities needed by teachers of gifted students.

The strategies in **Chapter 2** are designed to be used with curriculum that is skill-based and lends itself to pretesting, because some of your students will already know much of what you plan to teach. These strategies will help you meet the needs of your gifted students in any skill work related to reading, math, language arts, or other subject areas. Chapter 2 also contains information about creating and using extension activities.

The strategies in **Chapter 3** are designed to be used with subject areas in which most of the content is new to students, such as science, social studies, literature, problem-based learning, and interdisciplinary or thematic units. Methods other than pretests and learning contracts are often necessary for these types of curriculums. **Chapter 4** describes appropriate reading and writing instruction for gifted students, and **Chapter 5** explains how to plan differentiated curriculum for all of your students at the same time. Chapters 3 through 5 use many similar principles and methods, so you may want to read and use these chapters together.

**Chapter 6** shows you how to help gifted kids manage independent study based on personal interests. **Chapter 7** describes issues to consider when grouping gifted students for instruction and learning. Strategies for making cooperative learning fair for gifted students, and methods for grouping gifted students in homerooms or self-contained classes—including cluster grouping—are explained.

**Chapter 8** includes discussions of assessment and grading practices for gifted students and strategies for using technology to challenge gifted students. There are also many references to technology throughout the book. Technology is becoming integrated in students' learning, facilitates our easy location of extension activities, and can transform pretesting and formative assessment.

**Chapter 9** discusses issues related to gifted education programming, such as acceleration,

schoolwide cluster grouping, and International Baccalaureate programs; record-keeping for differentiation experiences; the roles of gifted education specialists; and how to interact with parents and colleagues.

**Chapter 10** (available in the digital content) is intended to be read by parents of gifted kids. Teachers should read it, too, so they can anticipate parents' questions and expectations. Sharing this section with the parents of gifted students before you conference with them is often very productive.

Finally, the **Conclusion** pulls all of the book's content together, while the **References and Resources** section lists research and information materials, arranged by chapter, which can assist you in keeping your gifted students motivated to move forward in their learning.

The **digital content** included with the book contains all the reproducible forms from the book. Many forms are customizable, which means you can alter them and print out your own versions. The digital content also includes Chapter 10 on Parenting, 20 additional extension menus, and a PowerPoint presentation that provides an overview of concepts and strategies described in the book and can be used for professional development. For information on how to access the digital content, see page vi.

## How to Use This Book and Digital Content

The chapters presented here flow the best if the book is examined from start to finish. However, if you decide to study one or two chapters ahead of the others or to read the chapters in a different order, that's perfectly fine as well.

The book is intended for educators of gifted students. It is an essential resource for every classroom teacher and every building principal, and even for some parents. All classes have some overlooked gifted kids, and we want this book to be a resource for all teachers, whether or not they have any identified gifted students in their classes. As districts restructure the way they deliver gifted education services, administrators often tell parents that although self-contained and/or pull-out classes have been cancelled, the "gifted program"

will now take place in the regular classroom. That promise cannot be kept unless those regular classroom teachers know how to challenge gifted students. As a teacher of gifted students in any setting, you can use this book as your guide to meeting those students' unique needs. Administrators promising to meet gifted students' needs can fulfill that commitment by sharing this book with all classroom teachers and allowing them time to study its contents and plan for differentiation. An ongoing book study will ensure that you implement the strategies successfully.

This book is also useful in PLCs (professional learning communities) studying issues regarding differentiation, keeping families enrolled in your school or district, and gifted education issues in general. The PowerPoint presentation included in the accompanying digital content can be used at grade-level or department meetings, and for coaching teachers toward optimum success with all their students.

Overall, we must remember: *Gifted kids are gifted 24 hours a day*, not just during those times they spend in separate classes or on challenging projects or activities. Our goal must be to provide conditions that allow gifted kids to experience consistent opportunities to truly enjoy school and be as challenged and productive as possible. With that in mind, make this *your* book. It's written for you to use without much fuss. All methods have been field-tested with educators like yourself who have found them to work very effectively and who have found through this book the confidence and capability to inspire positive attitudes toward school in gifted students and to keep them on the path to being enthusiastic lifelong learners.

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Gifted kids are gifted 24 hours a day, not just during those times they spend in separate classes or on challenging projects or activities.

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Here are our promises to you, our readers:

- We promise you that the strategies presented here will work in your heterogeneous classes as well as in gifted cluster classes and open-enrollment Honors and AP programs.

- We promise you that these strategies and techniques will also be useful for many students besides those formally identified as gifted.
- We promise you that there will be little or no resentment on the part of your other students as they see gifted students “doing their own thing.”
- We promise that you won't have to spend long hours preparing extension materials.
- Finally, we promise you the following results for your gifted students:
  - ◆ They will be more motivated.
  - ◆ They will be more productive—they will actually get their work done.
  - ◆ They will feel safe to demonstrate their advanced abilities.
  - ◆ They will have more positive feelings about school.
  - ◆ Their parents will be pleased with what's happening in your class and will be content to allow their children to continue their education at your school.

- ◆ Their teacher (you) will be pleased with their attitude and productivity and with the professionally satisfying results of your efforts.

To make sure your gifted students never feel like you are stealing their learning time, make use of the strategies presented in this book. Everything you need to know to be able to teach them well is inside these covers.

Most importantly, don't spend any time or energy feeling guilty about what you should have done differently in the past. If you had known what to do, you would have done it. This book will help you learn how to teach gifted kids well, starting now. Watch these students become more motivated to work, less sullen and hostile, less driven to always be perfect, and more likely to enjoy school and your teaching. Listen to their parents thank you for making their children's school experience so enjoyable and rewarding. Notice the positive feelings you experience as you realize you are truly meeting the exceptional learning needs of *all* of your students. Are you ready? Let's get started.

*Susan Winebrenner and Dina Brulles*

## CHAPTER 1

# Characteristics of Gifted Students

### ★ STRATEGIES

- The Name Card Method, page 14

Being gifted in schools today is not necessarily a positive experience. Gifted students and their parents experience a lot of rejection from an educational system in which conformity is valued and most kids are expected to work along with the group without resistance or complaint. We have long wondered why educators spend considerable time and effort teaching students to appreciate diversity in ethnic and cultural terms but don't extend that mindset to differences in learning ability. Gifted children do not ask to be born that way; it just happens. We need to consider giftedness as simply another difference and make gifted children as welcome in our classrooms as any other student.

In terms of classroom teaching, gifted students may be defined as those who have ability that exceeds grade- or age-level expectations by two years or more. Some gifted students have the potential to exceed expectations, but need teachers who understand their innately different

learning needs to develop that potential. By this definition, the regular curriculum and standard instructional strategies can't possibly provide the challenge these students need to continually move forward in their learning.

Some fascinating insights into giftedness have emerged from the work of Polish psychiatrist and psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski (1902–1980). When Dabrowski studied a group of gifted children and teens, he found that they displayed what he called “overexcitabilities.” They perceived all kinds of stimuli more intensely than others did, they were super-sensitive to everything in their environment, and they felt the joys and sorrows of life more extremely than other children. Today, overexcitability, or OE, is considered a marker of giftedness, one of the many things to look for when identifying a gifted child. Dabrowski believed that OE can lead to a series of “positive disintegrations,” or developmental crises, during which the individual rejects the status quo and questions everything. When things go well, the person emerges from this process as an autonomous, authentic human being with carefully thought-out values and beliefs. When things don't go well, the person may get stuck in antisocial behavior, disharmony, and

despair. Dabrowski's theories help us understand why living with and teaching gifted kids can be such an incredible challenge.

In order to help identify those who might need an alternative approach to learning, people often ask for a short list of common characteristics of gifted children. Students who possess most or all of the following five characteristics may be gifted, and may benefit from differentiated instruction and compacted curriculum.

1. They learn new material faster and at an earlier age than their age peers.
2. They remember what they have learned for a very long time, making review unnecessary.
3. They are able to deal with concepts that are too complex and abstract for their age peers.
4. They have a passionate interest in one or more topics and would spend all available time learning more about those topics if they could.
5. They do not need to watch the teacher to understand what is being said, and they can process more than one task at a time.

Other characteristics are described throughout this chapter. All gifted children do not possess all of these characteristics. However, when you observe students consistently exhibiting many of these behaviors, the possibility that they are gifted is very strong. Trust your own observations more than how they perform on criterion-referenced standardized test scores or grades. Listen respectfully to parents whose descriptions of their children at home match some of the information presented here. Sometimes, gifted kids do not appear gifted at school but demonstrate gifted characteristics at home.

It's rare to find a child who is gifted across all academic areas. Most gifted kids are more likely to be advanced in one or two specific areas. Asynchronous development is common with gifted kids. This is seen when children are highly advanced in one or more areas and average in other areas. For example, highly verbal children may appear emotionally immature or deficient in bodily kinesthetic abilities (as seen in physical

education classes). Sometimes their physical abilities are developmentally appropriate for their age but seem glaringly outpaced by their intellectual abilities. Compacting and differentiation opportunities are just as appropriate for children who show evidence of giftedness in one or two areas as they are for those who are gifted in several areas.

You might never be asked to formally identify gifted students. In fact, as you'll learn later in this chapter, gifted students often informally "identify" themselves by showing their readiness for compacting and differentiation. The characteristics are included here in case you need guidelines for recognizing behaviors associated with giftedness.

## Learning and Behavioral Characteristics of Gifted Students

Gifted students might:

- Learn at a much earlier age than their age peers and make much more rapid progress in certain areas of learning.
- Be high achievers and motivated by high grades.
- Delight in completing work with precision and excellence.
- Exhibit asynchronous development. (Be highly precocious in some areas while demonstrating age-appropriate or delayed behaviors in other areas.)
- Have advanced vocabularies and verbal abilities for their age level.
- Have outstanding memories, possess lots of information, and be able to process it in sophisticated ways.
- Learn some things very easily with little help from others and seek to master certain topics of study.

- Operate on higher levels of thinking than their age peers, be comfortable with abstract and complex thinking tasks, and need a minimum of concrete experiences for complete understanding.
- Perceive subtle cause-and-effect relationships, and see patterns, relationships, and connections that others do not see.
- See better ways for doing things and suggest them to others, not always in positive or appreciated ways.
- Prefer complex and challenging tasks to basic work and may change simple tasks or directions to more complex ones to stay interested.
- Transfer concepts and learning to new situations.
- Make intuitive leaps toward understanding without being able to, or caring to, explain how they got there.
- Want to share all they know and love to know reasons for everything.
- Like to be noticed and appreciated for their advanced abilities.
- Be curious about many things and ask endless questions.
- Be keen observers who don't miss a thing.
- Be very intense and extremely emotional and excitable.
- Have a tendency to become totally absorbed in activities and thoughts and lose awareness of what's going on around them.
- Have difficulty making transitions and be reluctant to move from one subject area to another.
- Have many (sometimes unusual) interests, hobbies, and collections, and have a passionate interest that has lasted for many years.
- Be strongly motivated to do things of interest in their own way, like making discoveries and solving problems.
- Prefer to work alone.
- Have a very high energy level, seem to require little sleep, and have difficulty calming down or falling to sleep because they are so busy thinking, planning, problem solving, and creating.
- Be very sensitive to beauty and other people's feelings, emotions, and expectations.
- Have an advanced sense of justice, morality, empathy, and fairness, especially about global issues that many of their age peers aren't interested in.
- Have sophisticated senses of humor that can be inappropriate at times.
- Like to be in charge and are natural leaders.

**NOTE** Not all gifted kids learn to read before starting school and not all kids who learn to read before starting school are gifted. One significant indication of giftedness is the child who teaches himself or herself to read, with little or no help from an adult.

While many of these characteristics can be considered in a positive light, many pose inherent challenges in the classroom. Some challenges associated with having outstanding talents are often perceived as problems with behavior, motivation, or attitude. In addition to the characteristics previously listed, gifted children whose learning needs are not met in school might:

- Resist doing schoolwork or homework, or work in a sloppy, careless manner.
- Become frustrated with the pace of the class and what they perceive as stagnant or mundane progress.
- Rebel against routine and predictability.
- Ask embarrassing questions and demand good reasons for why things are done a certain way.
- Resist taking direction or orders.
- Daydream.
- Monopolize class discussions.
- Be bossy with peers and teachers.

- Become intolerant of their own imperfections and those of others.
- React in a super-sensitive way to any form of criticism or cry easily.
- Refuse to conform.
- Resist cooperative learning.
- Act out or disturb others.
- Be the “class clowns.”
- Become impatient when they’re not called on to recite or respond; blurt out answers without raising their hands.

When you notice these problems, don't panic! Before trying to “fix” the child, fix the curriculum and instruction by following the suggestions in this book. More often than not, an understanding of the academic, social, and emotional needs of gifted students, while differentiating instruction and compacting curriculum for them, can noticeably diminish negative behaviors and enhance their more positive behaviors.

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More often than not, an understanding of the academic, social, and emotional needs of gifted students can noticeably diminish negative behaviors and enhance their more positive behaviors.

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## ★ STRATEGY

### The Name Card Method<sup>1</sup>

If there's one thing many gifted kids have in common—except those who have given up on school and retreated into full-time daydreaming—it's the tendency to blurt out answers and dominate class discussions. Even students whose learning needs are being met by compacting and differentiation have a hard time controlling these

impulses. Conversely, there are also those gifted students who are shy or insecure and choose not to show their advanced intelligence by participating in class discussions. A method is needed to ensure that all students are fully engaged in discussions at all times. Sounds like a tall order, but it's really not.

An alternative to hand raising, the Name Card method is a great solution. Teachers who use this method claim they simply cannot teach without it, because its benefits are numerous. The Name Card method:

- Minimizes blurring and other attention-getting, discussion-controlling behaviors.
- Ensures nearly total participation in all discussions by all students; makes it impossible for anyone to “hide.”
- Greatly improves listening behaviors. Students feel the need to hear every word said by the teacher and by other students.
- Eliminates teaching behaviors that may inadvertently communicate ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, or gender bias.

Start by trying this method in one subject area or class period. Don't add other subjects or classes until you feel comfortable with the method and can see evidence of its positive outcomes.

1. Write each student's name on a 3" x 5" card. (Some teachers prefer using tongue depressors or Popsicle sticks.)
2. Tell your students that when you use the cards, instead of calling on people who raise their hands, you will call on the person whose name is on the card you've drawn randomly from the stack. Explain that you'll ignore any hand-waving, noise-making gestures, deep sighs, rolling eyes, and other behaviors they use to attempt to get your attention.
3. Group students in “discussion buddy” pairs. Explain that they will stay in their pairs for a specific period of time, perhaps two to

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from “Think-Pair-Share, Thinktrix, Thinklinks, and Weird Facts” by Frank T. Lyman Jr., in *Enhancing Thinking through Cooperative Learning*, edited by Neil Davidson and Toni Worsham. Columbia, NY: Teachers College Press, 1992. Used with permission of Frank T. Lyman Jr.



three weeks, after which you'll match them with other partners. Make it clear that you'll choose the pairs, and that you'll change them on a regular basis.

Each pair should consist of students who are at different levels of competency. *Exception:* Students who are highly capable in that subject or content area should be grouped with each other—especially the blurters. They will be less likely to blurt and more likely to participate when their partners are similar to them in learning ability and understand and appreciate their passion for knowing everything.

If you have a student no one wants to partner with, privately ask a particularly sensitive and helpful student if he or she will be that student's partner for this period. ("Future teacher/social worker" types are usually glad to oblige.)

4. Use the Think-Pair-Share method created by Dr. Frank Lyman. Ask an open-ended question. Give students a few seconds to think about their response, and tell them they can jot down their ideas if they like.
5. Tell students you are going to give them time to talk with their discussion buddies and come up with several more responses to the question. Demonstrate the signal you will use to indicate when pair time is over. When you give the signal, they should stop talking to each other and redirect their attention to you. Some teachers find it helpful to practice this in advance.
6. Let students know that when you call on them after pair time using the name cards, they will have to give an answer. It could be their own idea or their buddy's idea; they don't have to declare whose idea it is. The goal is simply to have everyone engaged.

Explain that they should answer loudly enough for the whole class to hear, since you won't be repeating anyone's answer. Tell them also that they cannot repeat what others have said, and that no one can say, "I pass." Since they will have time to confer with their partners, it's highly likely they will have an answer when you call on them.

7. Give the students 30–45 seconds of pair time. Tell them to use soft voices. Like before, they can jot down their ideas.

You may be worrying that your kids will get off-task during pair time. If you consistently keep the allotted time to under a minute, and use the name cards, they will stay on task.

8. Using the name cards, call on students to share what they have discussed. When you call on a student, he may share any response he and his partner came up with, as long as no one else has already given that answer.

To enjoy all the benefits of the Name Card method, it's important to follow these guidelines when calling on kids:

- Don't look at the cards before asking a question. If you do, you'll try to match the question's level of difficulty with your perception of the student's ability. This sends a clear message of your expectations for that student, whether high or low. Since you have paired struggling students with supportive partners, it's okay to ask challenging questions of all students.
- Don't show the cards to the students. Every now and then, you may want to call on someone other than the person whose name card you pull—such as a student who's getting very impatient to participate.
- Once you call on a student, stay with him or her until you get a response. Don't ask the class to help. Wait 10 seconds (no more), and if the student hasn't responded by then, start to coach him or her. Provide a clue or hint, give a choice between two alternatives, or allow the student more time to consult with the partner while you call on other kids. Always be certain to return to the student for a response within 60 seconds, so the student will know you have confidence that he or she is a capable learner. *Important:* Don't call on someone other than the partner to help. This is embarrassing and counterproductive to the goal of total participation.

- When you finish with a name card, put it somewhere inside the stack, never on the bottom. Shuffle the stack often. This way, kids won't stop paying attention once they've been called on, because they know they might be called on again at any time. Of course, some students will get more chances than others to respond, but that's okay, since all students actually answer every question anyway with their partners.
- If you use tongue depressors instead of cards, use only one can. Never put the used ones in another can, or you run the risk of losing the students' attention.

9. Using the name cards, call on several students to share before commenting or giving your input. Simply "receive" their responses in a noncommittal way. You might nod or say "Thank you" or "Okay."

When you show that you'll receive multiple responses to the same question, students don't stop thinking about the question even after someone else has answered it. They know their name card might be next and they'll have to come up with a reasonable response as well.

10. Before moving on to the next question, for the benefit of students who enjoy sharing their deep wealth of knowledge, ask, "Does anyone have anything to add that hasn't already been said? Raise your hand if you do."

Make it very clear that they may only *add* to the discussion; they may not repeat what has already been said. If they do repeat, they forfeit their right to add anything more to the rest of that particular discussion. (This encourages students to listen carefully to the contributions of their classmates.) They can continue to participate in the activity, however, because their name card stays in the stack.

Kids who have tended to dominate discussions in the past are now in a very satisfying situation. They get to tell the answers to all of the questions to their partners, and they always have the opportunity to add to a discussion.

## Perfectionism

In addition to dominating class discussions, many gifted kids also exhibit characteristics of perfectionism. In the primary grades, these perfectionists are easy to spot. They work ever so slowly to create a perfect product, constantly asking you, "Is this okay? Is this what you want me to do?" In the upper grades, perfectionism becomes harder to identify, since it may look more like procrastination. Gifted kids begin avoiding assignments, reasoning that, "Since I probably can't do this perfectly because I don't have the right materials or the teacher hasn't given us enough time, I may as well not bother doing it at all." This handy defense mechanism hides an underlying anxiety that if they do give the assignment their best shot, and it isn't good enough to earn the top grade, they might not be able to handle the consequences.

### Perfectionist Characteristics

Perfectionists often:

- Believe that what they can do is more important and valuable than who they are.
- Believe that their worth as human beings depends on being perfect.
- Set impossible goals for themselves.
- Have been praised consistently for their "greatness" and exceptional ability; fear they will lose the regard of others if they can't continue to demonstrate that exceptionality.
- May suffer from the "Impostor Syndrome"—the belief that they aren't really very capable and don't deserve their success.
- Resist challenging work for fear that their struggle will be seen by others.
- Work very slowly in the hope that their products will be perfect.

- Discover a mistake in their work; erase until there is a hole in the paper, or crumple up the paper and throw it away—sometimes accompanied by tears.
- Limit their options and avoid taking risks.
- Procrastinate to the point at which work never gets done or even started. In this way, they ensure that no one can ever really judge their work, and they don't have to face the possibility that their best may not be good enough.
- May cry easily in frustration when their work at school doesn't seem to reach a state of being perfect. (This is often misjudged as immaturity or the result of too much pressure from home.)
- Ask for lots of extra time to complete their work.
- Ask for lots of help and reassurance from the teacher. ("Is this all right? Please repeat the directions.")
- Can't take criticism or suggestions for improvement without being defensive, angry, or tearful. Criticism proves that they aren't perfect, and suggestions imply that they aren't perfect. Imperfection is intolerable.
- Expect other people to be perfect—especially classmates, teammates, and teachers.
- Are never satisfied with their successes.

Parents and teachers unwittingly contribute to the need of these students to be perfect at all times. In their early years at home, these children notice how the adults in their life make a pleasant fuss when they exhibit precocious behaviors. Well-meaning teachers add fuel to the fire when they call attention to a student's exceptional work, holding it up as a model for the other students without knowing whether any true effort was involved.

Meanwhile, capable students who just didn't feel like doing their best on a particular assignment get it back for revision, with some comment like, "C'mon, Amy, you can do better than this! I'll

give you another chance to earn an A." To these students, the message is clear: "Adults like me more when I'm the best—when my work is perfect and deserves an A." Since most adults have been known to goof off occasionally and do a less than perfect job on some project that doesn't interest them, perhaps those same adults should lighten up on their expectations for gifted kids. We need to teach kids how to struggle to learn, not how to keep completing tasks without true effort.

Starting in kindergarten, it becomes the teacher's responsibility to communicate to students that authentic learning involves struggle, and that what one already knows represents memory, not learning. The way to communicate these important concepts is by consistently providing gifted students with challenging, possibly even slightly frustrating work. Furthermore, these students need to learn that the best grade possible represents a long-term goal of mastery, and that lower grades are not a reflection of inadequacy, but an indication that mastery has not yet been achieved.

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Teachers can support this risk-taking behavior by refraining from always expecting perfect work and grades from gifted students, and by encouraging them to try tasks that are truly difficult for them. Gifted students need to develop an appreciation for the values that accompany the struggle to learn. They need to replace their self-talk that says, "I must make it appear that the work is effortless so no one questions my intelligence" with a message that says, "True intelligence is reflected in my willingness to stay with a frustrating and difficult task until mastery is achieved."

## The Problem with Praise

It's also possible that praising a child too much can contribute to perfectionism, especially if the praise is for the child's natural abilities or products that didn't require much effort. High praise can make a child believe that if you're smart, all learning should come easily.

Research by Dr. Carol Dweck at Stanford University has affirmed this fact.<sup>2</sup> Dweck conducted an experiment with 400 fifth graders of varying ability levels to see what really motivated them to welcome difficult learning tasks. Students were divided at random into three groups, and all students were given a puzzle task that was challenging but attainable. Upon completion of the task, a third of the students were praised for their intelligence, with phrases such as, "You must be really smart—you got a really good score." Another third of the students were praised for their effort: "Your answer was correct—I can tell you worked very hard on this task. Good for you." The final third were praised only for the outcome they got, with no comment on why they had been successful.

The same students were then told another task was to follow. They were asked if they wanted to try a more challenging task from which they could learn a lot, or an easier task on which they were sure to do well. Can you guess which of the three groups chose the more challenging task? Yes, the students who took the most risk and chose the difficult task were *not* those who had previously been praised for "being smart," but rather those who had been praised for their effort. Those praised for their innate ability wanted the easier task, because they were afraid to do anything that might cause others to question their smarts.

This is an important lesson for parents and teachers. When we praise our gifted kids for their abilities with comments like, "You are really very smart," they are likely to choose the safe path that is guaranteed to allow them to continue to think they are smart. These kids conclude that adults prefer to observe them in situations where they are easily successful. But when we instead praise

young people for their effort and hard work, they are more likely to want to remain engaged in the activity, believing that hard work will lead to better outcomes.

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Attribution theory, or what Dweck calls "mindset theory," can be used to explain why this happens. People who attribute their success to their inborn ability live in fear that one day their fixed ability will not be sufficient for some required task; they have a "fixed mindset." But people who attribute their success to hard work are in complete control of the outcome; they have a "growth mindset." All they have to do is work harder to grow. When we instill that essential knowledge in the children we care about, they are on the road to lifetime achievement.

Teachers and parents who implement effort-based praise are often astonished at how quickly they observe a difference in their kids—sometimes in a week or less! They are delighted to observe a much higher motivation to learn and to work hard on appropriately challenging schoolwork.

## Ways to Help the Perfectionistic Child

Our most important job as teachers of gifted students is to help them understand that it's perfectly all right to struggle to learn, and that the world will not think less of them because that struggle is apparent. You need to make sure that all of your students, including those who are gifted, are always working on tasks that require real effort. In order to do that, you must be willing to assess and give full credit for previous mastery each time an instructional unit begins. Once you discover that some students have already mastered what you are about to teach, their class

<sup>2</sup>Dweck, 2008.

time should be spent on alternate activities that challenge them.

- Help perfectionists learn that success with long-term goals is merely an accumulation of successes with short-term goals. The Goal-Setting Log on page 21 is a very effective tool you can use to teach this concept. Once students form the habit of taking pride in their ability to set and reach a goal during today's work period, they can worry less about whether the final product, due two weeks later, will be perfect.
- Teach them how to use creative problem solving (CPS). In CPS, sometimes the best or most useful ideas come later in the brainstorming process. This relieves kids of some of the pressure to get the "right answer" quickly.
- Avoid the phrase "Always do your very best." When you want to encourage your students to work their hardest, say, "Put forth your *best effort*." This shifts the emphasis from the product to the learning process.

## How to Use the Goal-Setting Log

The Goal-Setting Log is designed to be used by students who have trouble getting started with a task, who work too slowly, or who never seem to be able to finish long-term tasks. It's especially helpful for perfectionists. You'll find a reproducible Goal-Setting Log on page 21.

1. At the beginning of each work period, have students enter the date in the left column. In the center column, they should write a brief description of the work they predict they can accomplish *during that single work period*.
2. Five minutes before the end of the work period, have students complete the right column by recording how much work they have actually accomplished. If they accomplished less than they predicted, they should move down a line, record tomorrow's date (or the date of the next work period), and briefly describe the work they have left to do.

Always keep the logs in the classroom—in the students' folders, their compacting folders (see page 39), or a community folder if necessary. Have all students who use the logs sit in the same general area. Work with them as a group to set and review their goals.

For some students, old habits die hard, and they may have trouble letting go of their perfectionism. Guide them through this review:

*If the goal has been met, ask:*

- What was your goal?
- Did you accomplish your goal?
- Who is responsible for your success in reaching your goal? (It may take patience and prodding, but the student must respond, "I am responsible for my success in accomplishing my goal.")
- How does it feel to be successful? (Again, you may have to prompt the student to say, "It feels good to be successful.")
- How can you congratulate yourself or give yourself some recognition for a job well done? (Offer suggestions if necessary.)

*If the goal has not been met, ask:*

- What was your goal?
- Did you accomplish your goal?
- Who is responsible for the fact that you didn't reach your goal? (The student may blame some external source. Don't ask how it feels not to accomplish the goal. Instead, prompt until the student can say, "I am responsible for not reaching my goal.")
- What plan can you make for tomorrow to prevent the same problem from happening again? (Have the student write his or her plan on the back of the Goal-Setting Log.)
- Never reprimand students who don't reach their goals. The best way to get kids on track is to help them learn to set realistic goals and feel satisfaction from reaching them. The inability to earn positive feedback (from themselves and from you) is all the reprimanding they need.

- If you must grade students' work under this arrangement, we recommend he or she earns:
  - ◆ a C for reaching a goal that is well below the work you expect from the rest of the class.
  - ◆ a B when the goal gets into the grade-level range.
  - ◆ an A only for exceptional work that either meets most of the "Above Proficiency" standards or exceeds grade-level standards altogether.

Have students work on one area or subject at a time until progress is apparent and success feels comfortable to them. If you add other areas or subjects too quickly, students may develop a "fear of success." (As in: "Adults always expect more of you if you show them what you can do. I guess I should stop working so hard.")

## Creative Thinkers

Creative thinkers often aren't identified as gifted because their behavior tends to annoy teachers, and their apparent "fooling around" often results in incomplete work. Many creative thinkers don't do well in school. They get poor grades, refuse or forget to hand in work on time, and constantly argue for things to be done differently. They are so challenging that we sometimes forget that the people who have made the most significant contributions to humankind throughout history generally exhibit many characteristics of creative thinkers. It's the nonconformists who are the problem-solvers, artists, dreamers, and inventors, thinking "outside the box" in ways that profoundly affect our lives. Some people who come to mind are Thomas Edison, Steve Jobs, Mahatma Gandhi, Oprah Winfrey, and Steven Spielberg, to name a few.

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Sometimes we forget that the people who have made the most significant contributions to humankind throughout history generally exhibit many characteristics of creative thinkers.

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Creative thinkers often:

- Display original ideas and products. Are sometimes characterized as thinking up "wild and crazy ideas."
- Are fluent in idea generation and development. Notice endless possibilities for situations or ways objects may be used.
- Are able to elaborate on ideas. Add details others don't think of.
- Demonstrate flexibility of ideas and points of view. Can see merit in looking at things and situations from numerous perspectives.
- Experiment with ideas and hunches.
- Have outstanding senses of humor. Love to play with words and ideas.
- Are impatient with routine and predictable tasks. Add or change directions given by the teacher to make assignments more interesting.
- Have a tremendous capacity for making unexpected connections.
- Challenge accepted assumptions.
- Say what they think without regard for consequences. Are capable of great independence and autonomy.
- Have a great imagination; daydream often. Enjoy pretending; may have one or several imaginary playmates.
- Dress or groom in nonconformist ways.
- Can persist at one task to the total exclusion of others.
- Are brilliant, but absentminded about details.
- Are passionately interested in a particular topic or field of endeavor.

*text continues on page 22*