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Sheena Osborne

Northwestern College - Orange City

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Meeting the Needs of the Brightest

Sheena Osborne

Northwestern College

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Abstract

The importance of ensuring that talented and gifted students' needs are being met in the general education classroom is essential to not only their future, but also society's future. Gifted students tend to be left in the shadows of high-stakes testing and the rest of their classmates' needs due to a lack of understanding, in terms of their unique set of social emotional and academic needs.

Differentiation is a necessity to ensure their needs are being met and these bright students are being push to the edge of their abilities. This literature review will focus on the importance of differentiation and discuss research-based strategies to be used in the classroom.

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Differentiation, educators live and breathe it. It has become not only a common classroom term, but also a priority across the country. Classrooms have a variety of personalities, learning styles, behaviors, motivation levels, and interests. The differentiation movement has squandered the acceptability of giving every student the same lesson delivery and the same assignment. Meeting the needs of all learners in the classroom, from one end of the bell curve to the other, is a non-negotiable. However, are teachers truly meeting the needs of *all* learners in their classrooms?

The most exceptional and high ability learners, talented and gifted students, are often lumped together with the high achievers in the classroom receiving a curriculum they might not necessarily need or benefit from. As a result, they are not reaching their highest potential. In a study conducted by Young and Balli (2014), surveys were given to fifty-two talented and gifted identified students in grades 4-7 and their parents from 10 public schools (i.e., seven neighborhood and three magnet schools) to determine whether their educational needs were being met and they were being challenged in the classroom. Results yielded a high level of dissatisfaction with the amount of differentiation/challenge they or their child was receiving in the seven neighborhood schools. However, results also revealed that students who attended at the magnet schools that had a focus on gifted education were highly pleased with the level of rigor. Young and Balli (2014) went on to say that, students who do not receive the appropriate learning opportunities in the classroom might not reach the level of academic achievement they are truly capable of attaining.

The lack of rigor and differentiation offered to the strongest and brightest students can have a severe impact on their academic and social emotional development, as well as their

future. Research has consistently proven that when gifted students are not challenged appropriately, academic underachievement and withdrawal can occur (Robinson, 2003). Behavioral and opinion shifts, such as lower self-esteem or confidence levels, changes in their mood, not wanting to attend school, and acting out are all signs that the child may be bored, frustrated, and their educational needs are not being satisfied. Moreover, one of the most significant consequences of not being challenged is that the gifted child never actually learns how to navigate the process of learning. This is a disservice to not only the children, but to the future and society, as well. “It's a big loss for lots of reasons, including the fact that these precocious kids represent a unique pool of talent for generating new ideas and innovations” (Chen, 2014). This paper will review how teachers ensure gifted students are being supported and challenged through differentiation, rather than being bored and under-stimulated.

Literature Review

Differentiation is a critical component in the planning process when creating lessons for gifted students. Unfortunately, according to VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005), there are barriers, such as planning time, classroom management skills, appropriate modification to the curriculum, and lack of relevant pedagogical skills that can prevent gifted students from receiving the education they crave and deserve. “Growth, change, and advanced levels of gifted student achievement can only occur when educators and leaders acknowledge the barriers and take the necessary steps toward minimizing” (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005, p. 215). Once barriers are addressed, specific instructional strategies can then be learned and implemented.

Just as there are instructional strategies for struggling students, there is a variety of research-based strategies to use with our quickest learners. Gifted students arrive at school

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wanting to learn and be challenged, not to sit through lessons covering skills and concepts they already know. In the study carried out by Young and Balli (2014), as mentioned previously, surveys showed there was little to no quality differentiation occurring in the classroom, and students were still participating in lessons containing content and skills they had already mastered. Differentiation, which is challenging and rigorous, is an essential piece of ensuring gifted students are not only successful in the classroom, but have a positive attitude about their school experience. Inevitably, being aware of necessary instructional strategies and understanding how to implement those strategies effectively is imperative in meeting the needs of these types of learners.

It is important to note that the terms challenge and differentiation are not synonymous. Just because a teacher is differentiating does not necessarily mean the activity or assignment is challenging, and just because an activity is viewed as challenging, it does not necessarily mean the student is benefiting. Kaplan (2016) discusses the term challenge and how it is typically viewed alongside of the words difficult, hard, fun, and enrichment, for example. However, when challenging gifted students in the classroom, it is important to consider two factors: readiness and appropriateness. Readiness examines the link between the learners and the learning experience. Kaplan (2016) goes on to say that, it is important to investigate if the challenge is attainable or unattainable by the student, and what are the necessary steps in preparing the student for this challenge. The second factor to examine is appropriateness. This looks at how the challenge is connected to the “academic, personal and/or social needs, interests, and abilities of the learner” (Kaplan, 2016, p. 115). Challenges must be intentional to be beneficially differentiated.

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Julian Stanley developed 'Diagnostic Prescriptive Assessments' in the 1970's, and they have been a staple in gifted programs ever since (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005, p. 215). Reis and Renzulli (1992) suggested a three-phase model to effectively carry out this differentiation strategy. To begin the pre-assessment process, one must examine the goals and objectives of that particular unit, chapter, and lesson. Determining which skills are new and which are being reviewed is an important factor to take into consideration. Not only does this entire process benefit the student, it also allows the teacher to become a better navigator and instructor of the material to be covered. Reis and Renzulli (1992) explain that the next phase in the process includes the identification of students who have already mastered the goals and objectives previously analyzed. Pre-assessing students on a particular concept or skill is the second step in determining what type of quality differentiation is needed. This will help students to reach their academic potential while being submerged in material and thought-processes that are more appropriate for their level of understanding and processing. While pre-assessing is important for all students, it is especially important for gifted learners, as it gives teachers the necessary information to differentiate appropriately in terms of depth and complexity, compacting, or even acceleration. A quality pre-assessment that is concentrated and quick will reveal a student's areas of strength and areas where they lack understanding. The final phase Reis and Renzulli (1992) suggest involves a variety of instructional strategies, such as flexible grouping, tiered instruction, curriculum compacting, independent and passion projects, and higher order questioning to meet the pre-determined needs of the students.

It is important to mention that gifted students are not always going to excel in everything they do in the classroom. A common misconception is that a gifted student will always be successful in all academic areas; however, it simply depends on where their giftedness lies.

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Gifted children are not always your typical straight-A attaining students. For example, a student could be incredibly gifted in math and still struggle with reading. Additionally, there are gifted students who are underachievers due to lack of social emotional guidance, teacher and parental support in terms of their giftedness, and academic rigor. In fact, Rimm, Siegle, and Davis (2018) state that 10 – 20% of high school student dropouts have been determined to be gifted individuals who are underachievers. This simply solidifies the significance of ensuring that these students, the brilliant individuals of our society's future, are having their intellectual curiosity met and are being pushed to their limits.

Once the pre-assessment results have been analyzed, the door opens to a variety of teaching methods that can be implemented in the general education classroom with gifted students. In order to gain the highest amount of benefit from instructional strategies, such as tiered instruction and assignments, higher-level questioning, and curriculum compacting, placing students with peers who are capable of attaining similar levels of academic achievement is essential. Ability grouping is an approach teachers can utilize to place their students into groups of like-learners, or groups of students who are at a similar ability level. Preckel, F., Schmidt, I., Stumpf, E., Motschenbacher, M., Vogl, K., Scherrer, V. and Schneider, W. (2017) carried out a three-year longitudinal study in Germany on the effects of ability grouping. The study had 922 students participate that were followed for three years starting in fifth grade. The conclusion of the study revealed that gifted students who were grouped based on their ability made larger academic gains than students of the same ability level who were not grouped.

Simply grouping students based on ability does not provide any advantage as achievement is not impacted. The power comes from what happens within those strategically assembled groups. Ability grouping and meaningful instruction go hand in hand. According to

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the National Association for Gifted Children (2018), grouping students, paired with rigorous instruction, not only provides high academic gains, but it also supports the development of their social emotional health. Furthermore, it provides more opportunities to learn from and share experiences with peers who are more similar to them not only cognitively, but also social emotionally, as well.

According to Clark (2013), there are four types of ability grouping: Flexible grouping, cluster grouping, heterogeneous and homogenous grouping. Flexible grouping is a strategy teachers can use to place their students into groups that are fluid and shift as the students' needs and knowledge level on a particular concept changes throughout the year. While this is beneficial for all students, it is especially valuable for gifted students because it not only allows a teacher to individualize his or her instruction; it also allows these students to learn with like-learners, which can provide the necessary depth and challenge for making their learning meaningful.

Additionally, Clark (2013) states that there are many advantages of flexible grouping such as, significant academic gains, positive self-concepts, more opportunities for in-depth and thought provoking discussions, and continued development of social emotional skills and behaviors.

Cluster grouping is a grouping strategy that places a 'cluster' of students, based on their TAG identification, together in one classroom for the entire school year. While research has proven this strategy is effective and valuable, if done correctly, it is most likely that a decision to implement cluster grouping would be made at the district or administrative level and not by the teacher.

The final two types of ability grouping are heterogeneous grouping and homogeneous grouping. Heterogeneous grouping involves placing students of all academic levels into one group. Concerns arise using this strategy not only with the highest of abilities, but also with any

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level of academic achievement. Homogeneous grouping, or the grouping of students based on their academic ability, no matter what it may be, has proven to benefit all students. It allows students to interact with others who think as they do, therefore, providing a more equitable playing field within the group.

Once students have been grouped appropriately, tiered instruction and assignments can be utilized. These allow all students within a classroom to focus on a specific learning objective while doing so at a level suitable for their needs. This is an excellent tool for gifted students as it allows them to continue to learning with the rest of the class while being challenged and pushed to understand the content at a new level. Assignments can be tiered for gifted students by varying depth and complexity, changing the process, the outcome, as well as the challenge level. Tiered assignments permit these students to begin learning where they are and not where the rest of their peers are.

Rimm et al. (2018) state that there are several circumstances that must be adhered to in order for tiered instruction to be effective in the classroom. The first essential with this strategy, as is with most other strategies, is professional development (Rimm et al., 2018). Teachers must receive training on the in's and out' of tiered instruction and assignments. Additionally, ensuring teachers have a strong background in the content they are tiering will help simplify a multifaceted process. Furthermore, teachers need to have an understanding of how the process will affect their classroom organization and instructional flow. Moreover, it is important to consider a typical gifted students' learning style preferences. As specified by Rimm et al. (2018), these students prefer assignments that are unstructured and flexible, and enjoy working independently or with peers who are at the same ability level. Knowing and understanding gifted

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students' preferences and needs is a vital component when using tiered instruction and assignments.

Asking questions to stimulate learning is a teaching strategy that has been around for ages. Teachers ask questions to determine a variety of answers, such as, what students already know and understand, to determine what was learned, and to support comprehension. However, asking questions that encourage learning and do not rely just on recollection from memorization is a necessary skill for teachers to consider when developing lessons for their gifted students. Higher-level questioning is a technique teachers can use to ensure gifted students are thinking critically, and their ability to think divergently is being fostered and continually developed. According to Shaunessy (2000), the goal of questioning should be to eventually move the student into more of a facilitator role to prepare them to become life-long learners who persistently ask questions that challenge them and extended their learning. Redfield and Rousseau (1991) completed a comprehensive evaluation of research available on how teachers questioning strategies can influence a student's level of achievement. Twenty studies were evaluated and it was determined that using higher level questioning with students does indeed have a positive influence on their achievement. Furthermore, this study revealed that regardless of the sample size or degree of experimental validity, if a teacher employs higher cognitive level questions student gains can be expected to increase.

Utilizing the six hierarchical categories of Bloom's Taxonomy is one way to determine how cognitively challenging questions are. Lower-order thinking questions would include the 'remember', 'understanding', and 'applying' tiers. Within the areas questions typically promote simple recall, listing, require examples, summarization, inferences, and/or the application of the material being studied in new situations. The 'analyzing', 'evaluating', and 'creating' tiers are

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deemed the areas where higher-order thinking questions should be developed. Questions from these categories would usually include skills such as discovering connections among subject matter, determining underlying themes, justifying decisions or beliefs, and designing a new product using the information and/or skills being learned. The student learning objectives need to be included in the reasoning behind the development of questions. While it is necessary and acceptable for all cognitive levels to be exercised during questioning, when working with talented and gifted students the focus should be on higher-level questions to ensure they are being required to think critically and dissect the information being processed.

Tofade, Elsner, and Haines (2013) state that there are several approaches teachers can take when formulating questions to ensure students are being encouraged to think creatively, divergently, and deeply about the subject matter at hand. A simplistic approach would be to categorize questions as convergent or divergent. Convergent questions, or closed questions, typically only have one or a few correct responses. Once the answer, or few possible answers, has been shared among peers, the learning comes to an end as there are no other options. Divergent questions, on the other hand, or open questions, extend and deepen learning. Once a student has provided a possible answer, the learning does not stop because there are more potential responses depending on the students' perspectives, beliefs, and background knowledge. Divergent questions are considered higher-order thinking questions due to the fact they encourage students to take the material being learned and analyze it to make connections, build reasonable cases to justify their thinking, and construct or assemble the information in a new way. Additionally, it is important to remember when using any questioning strategy; meaningful learning is not always about sharing and discussing what a student already knows. Powerful

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learning also comes from finding out what a student does not know, yet needs to know to continue a thoughtful contribution to the discussion.

Not only is it important for students to be asked challenging questions, it is also equally significant for them to learn how to construct and develop questions on their own. Macfarlane (2018) suggests that when planning curriculum it needs to not only include the thought-provoking questions the teacher is going to ask of the students, but it also needs to involve a plan for students coming up with their own questions allowing them to deepen their understanding and develop the skill of asking quality questions. When students are given the opportunity to develop their own, they must organize their thoughts and knowledge and take a multifaceted approach to the material. Not only are they being required to develop a thought-provoking question, they are also being forced to consider all of the possible answers which allows the depth and complexity to go to a new level. However, using the strategy of student-produced questions is a skill that needs to be developed and cannot simply be expected. Students must be educated on the types of questions and strategies to design them, just as a teacher would need to be before implementing.

While modified instructional strategies and/or assignments can be used successfully in the classroom, sometimes students are capable of, and need to, move through the grade level material more quickly. Curriculum compacting has shown to help to preserve gifted students' interest in school and learning. Moreover, it aids in keeping their motivation level high through eliminating the content that the student has already mastered and offering an adapted curriculum to meet their needs. As discussed previously, Renzulli, Smith, and Reis (1982) recommended and continue to recommend pre-testing as a tool to determine what can and needs to be compacted for gifted students. A form termed 'The Compactor' can be used to organize the

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analysis of what areas are being considered for compacting, as well as the assessments or evidence that suggests the student is a good candidate to move forward. Furthermore, activities that will be implemented to reach proficiency in basic skill areas, as well as the strategies and activates that will be used after the compacting takes place are required to be developed and recorded on this form.

While curriculum compacting should be a staple strategy offered in any gifted program, teachers need the appropriate training to carry out this strategy effectively. Reis and Renzulli (1992) designed and implemented a study with 27 school districts that included the participation of 465 second to sixth grade classroom teachers across the country. The goal was to determine whether or not curriculum compacting was an effective strategy to use with gifted students in the classroom when teachers were trained effectively. Reis and Renzulli's (1992) results revealed that teachers who partook in the most extensive amount of training offered among the treatment groups experienced the highest level of success with curriculum compacting. Additionally, students revealed they felt more motivated and engaged due to the already mastered content being eliminated (Reis & Renzulli, 1992).

A final strategy to meet the needs of gifted students is the use of independent studies or passion projects. These allows students to be a part of the decision making process, which is usually an atypical thing in the classroom. This strategy requires students to thoughtfully consider ideas, concepts, materials, and approaches from a different standpoint than they are accustomed to. It is no longer a learning experience that is led by the teacher. The student is now the main driver in a co-pilot situation. They have to develop their own ideas and support them, find materials and resources, and problem solve, sometimes through trial and error, when needed. The accountability shifts from the majority of it being on the teacher's shoulders to the

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responsibility predominately being placed in the students' hands. Independent studies and passion projects can foster and rekindle that spirit for learning that too many gifted students can lose in classrooms today due to surface teaching that results in boredom and lack of depth and complexity. Students can now take charge of their own learning, which so many gifted students crave.

According to Johnson and Goree (2005) an independent study should be self-directed, monitored by the teacher, and involve real-world topics that go beyond the classroom experience. These guiding principles fall in line with a typical gifted student's characteristics of being self-motivated and independent, having the desire to make choices with the teachers, and their intense interest in taking concepts wider and deeper with real world applications.

Independent projects are typically reserved for students who have already mastered the curriculum being taught and have the need to analyze the topic on a deeper and more complex level in place of regular instruction. Topics studied during this process are tied to the standards and curriculum; however, they still offer students a certain degree of choice, which they prefer. Powers (2008) implemented an independent invention study that involved a 7th grade social studies teacher who felt the need to challenge 20 of his gifted students more. The project involved an essential question and three separate phases: research, invention, and presentation. To determine results, students were given a survey before, during, and after that contained 12 questions pertaining to their opinions and feelings about the execution of the project. Findings revealed that students appreciated the challenge and the higher level of thinking it required. Areas where responses started lower (i.e., difficulty of work, fear of public speaking), increased and were high by the end of the project. All of the participants wanted to complete another independent study.

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Another way to allow gifted students more independence is by completing a passion project. It empowers students to be life-long learners through pursuing a topic that is of interest to them, rather than something that is required to be learned about through the curriculum. This type of project truly allows students to personalize their education, as it does not have to be connected to any standard or objective being learned in the classroom. Passion projects are something that all students can be involved in as there are no set standards of what is required, although guidance and final expectations throughout the process will vary from student to student depending on their needs. As a result, gifted students are able to work at a level that is appropriate for them. Students can take all of their drive and interest towards a particular topic and turn it into something meaningful. These ventures involve choosing any topic that is of intense interest to them and then researching it through the Internet, reading, possibly having hands on learning experiences, speaking with experts in the field, visiting appropriate locations, etc. In the end, students develop a final project that can be shared with an authentic audience (McNair, 2017). The result can vary from presentations to fundraisers, to inventions to creating organizations and beyond. Their creativity, ideas, and genuine motivation to pursue their passion is their only limit. Genius Hour, also referred to as 20%, is a popular way to refer to passion projects, and allows students to work on developing their interest for a designated amount of time per day or week.

Independent projects and passion projects are one of the more powerful differentiation strategies a teacher can implement in the classroom, as it allows students to learn about things that matter to them and are applicable to the real world. Unfortunately, teachers are not in the business of asking students, “What would you like to learn?” Learning has become so prescribed and predictable that students’ creativity is being squashed. Teaching is rushed and divergent

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thoughts of concepts being taught tend to be shut down due to lack of time and/or understanding. These types of projects allow students to channel that creativity and curiousness into something that is powerful and significant to them, which is something the education of our youth has moved away from.

To paint a clearer picture of the heights of differentiation that can be used in the classroom for gifted students, Betts (2004) discusses three levels of curriculum and instruction. The first level Betts (2004) shares consists of the prescribed curriculum and instruction that involves the knowledge and skills that all students in the classroom need to know on a surface level. This approach does not offer any depth or complexity for the gifted child. Betts (2000) goes on to describe the second level that is comprised of a teacher-differentiated curriculum, such as choices, flexible grouping, tiered assignments, higher order questioning, and curriculum compacting are offered throughout this level. Betts (2004) states that teachers are the ‘dispensers of knowledge’ during this time and the majority of instruction occurs here.

The final level is the learner-differentiated curriculum and instruction. Within this level the cognitive development, as well as the social development is addressed. Students now become facilitators of their own learning by choosing and designing the content, process, and product. Level three also contains additional subcategories that offer increasingly more challenging and rigorous learning approaches. Explorations involves researching ideas that are new to the students, or areas where problems or themes have developed. Several explorations are suggested before moving up to investigations. Investigations is more in-depth and independent, learning contracts are used, and passion topics may start to emerge. Additionally, a variety of ‘final products’ are incorporated. The highest level of learning, according to Betts (2004), is an in-depth study. Passion projects are utilized and mentors, based on project topics, are involved.

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Autonomous learning, creativity, and self-discovery are all involved during this point in the differentiation process. Knowing and understanding how to use differentiation to turn a gifted student into an autonomous learner is an extremely important piece of the complex task of educating the gifted.

The education of gifted children relies not only on the general education classroom teachers and the differentiation techniques in their tool belt, but a true understanding and acceptance of gifted students and their unique needs. However, this need of understanding and acceptance has been a struggle for the gifted community to obtain. In the classroom, the focus tends to be on students who are not at grade level, are close to reaching grade level (i.e., bubble kids), and those who are currently at grade level and keeping them there. The weight being put on standardized test scores and their significance when looking teacher performance is having a detrimental effect on the type of education gifted students are receiving every day in the classroom. The pressure for teachers to have all of their students perform at proficient levels is concerning. Not only are they required to drive their standardized test scores up, they are responsible for ensuring all of their students are meeting state academic standards (which are not always aligned to standardized tests), good citizens, and prepared for the real-world. Education does not simply involve memorization anymore. It is application and preparation to face the world head on and be successful. So where does this leave the gifted students in the classroom? They end up in the background, unchallenged, and learn to view school as unsatisfying, boring, and useless.

Unfortunately, a greater understanding and shift in beliefs needs to occur with gifted education. While the research is available to demonstrate the exceptional academic and social emotional needs of the gifted child, too many still believe that because a child is gifted they will

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be 'ok' or do not necessarily need differentiation to the extent discussed throughout this literature review. Westburg, Achambault, Dobyns, and Salvin (1993) carried out a study that examined whether or not over 7,000 third and fourth grade teachers across the United States felt that differentiation was occurring for the gifted student population and to what extent this was being done in the general education classroom, if at all. This study was replicated several times and each time the same unfortunate results were revealed, gifted students were not viewed as students who needed differentiation to the extent other average students in the general education classroom did (Westburg et al., 1993).

Providing professional development opportunities for teachers to learn more about gifted students' characteristics, learning styles, academic and social emotional needs is the first step in alleviating this problem. It is essential to make teachers aware that these children truly do have unique needs, and by not actively working to meet those needs, gifted students are suffering grave consequences. According to Clark (2013), a common misconception about the education of gifted and talented learners is that because they are gifted they are not at risk and will be able to get by on their own. However, research has and continues to prove otherwise. Clark (2013) goes on to say that; intelligence involves the intertwining of genetic patterns and the environment. In other words, if a gifted child is not challenged to the appropriate level, rather than progressing they actually regress to the mean. Additionally, the curriculums used in schools tend to not be designed with higher levels of thinking in mind. Spreading this knowledge to teachers can help make it known and understood that differentiation for gifted students in their classroom is an irrefutable necessity.

Furthermore, professional development opportunities that include instructional strategies to use with gifted students is an essential component in a gifted student's success. Quality

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educators recognize that differentiation is a necessary part of the classroom today. Classrooms are a melting pot of background knowledge, abilities, interests, and processing speeds. Meeting all students' needs is a non-negotiable in the education realm, yet meeting all students' needs, especially gifted students is not an easy task to accomplish with the barriers teachers face, especially with the level of accountability teachers are now experiencing. However, through understanding the available levels of differentiation and the implementation of a variety of instructional strategies, the amount of success a gifted student can experience in the classroom soars.

In order for gifted students to be prosperous in the general education setting, teachers can utilize several strategies. Two effective strategies that complement each other in the classroom are pre-testing and ability grouping. Pre-testing allows teachers to determine what content students have already mastered and what they still need to learn. Once that information has been determined, the classroom teachers can place students into groups based on results from the pre-tests. This allows students who are at similar cognitive levels to learn together. Research continues to demonstrate the effectiveness of ability grouping for not just gifted students, but all students involved. However, just grouping students based on ability does not increase achievement; rather, it depends on the type of instruction taking place within that group. Additional strategies to use with gifted students include tiered instruction and assignments, as well as curriculum compacting. Tiered instruction and assignments involve taking the learning target for that particular lesson or unit, and differentiating based on the needs of the students. All students are working towards a common objective, but how they arrive at the objective will vary depending on their academic level. Higher-level questioning is an additional technique teachers can use to within their ability groups and tiered instruction and assignments. These types of

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questions are designed to engage students while encouraging them to think critically and divergently about their thinking and reasoning for their answers, as well as their peers' answers and rationales. Not only do students benefit from being asked higher-level questions, they benefit just as much from synthesizing the information being learned with their perspectives and beliefs and creating their own questions.

There will be times when a gifted student has mastered the content not only at the grade level, but also in terms of depth and complexity. As a result, curriculum compacting becomes an effective strategy to use. During this strategy, teachers take the out the material already mastered and compact whatever standards are left. The speed at which this material is usually covered is condensed, as a typical gifted student only takes one to two repetitions to master something. Independent studies and passion projects are an excellent strategy to use with gifted students, especially after curriculum compacting. An independent study allows students to choose a topic connected to the standards being learned and conduct an in-depth study. A passion project allows gifted students to choose a topic of their choice that may or may not be connected to any standards being instructed on during that lesson or unit. "Gifted children who lack appropriate learning opportunities, many not achieve at the advanced levels needed to accomplish what they otherwise could" (Young & Bali, 2014, p. 236). Research based differentiation techniques, such as pre-testing, ability grouping, tiered instruction and assignments, higher-level questioning, curriculum compacting, and independent studies and passion projects are all tools to that can be used to ensure gifted students are being pushed and pulled in the right directions, forward and upward.

Future research in gifted education will always be necessary as there is always something new to learn, however, the larger focus needs to be on educating others about the research that is

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already out there. Advocating for the best and brightest of our societies and its future must become a priority. Education is currently failing these students, as they are not being pushed to the edge of their limits and are being forced to move at a pace that is having life-changing and world impacting repercussions.

“If there is one thing that many high-achieving students resent is having to face, day after day, the constant slow and repetitious pace imposed by their slow-learning peers in the regular classroom. Note that this particular problem very rarely surfaces in sports or arts; their talent development practices almost always automatically maintain that cutting edge teaching strategy” (Gange, 2015, p. 288).

Understanding must increase. Priorities must shift. Attitudes must change. Exceptional differentiation must occur.

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