

## **Inclusion of Gifted Learners in Regular Classrooms: Implication for Gifted Learners' Special Needs**

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Inclusion or integration began as a movement to include children with special needs in regular school programs from which many such children have been excluded by virtue of segregation in special education classrooms or schools. On the other hand, segregation of children with special needs has been justified by the need for intensive, individualized and distinctive instructional programs and strategies, to assist such children to overcome their educational deficits or enhance their academic performance.

Proponents of inclusion have argued that segregated programs for children with special needs prevent the children from easily entering mainstream society from which they have had educational segregation (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). This has been a particular concern for parents of children with disabilities, who "want their children to have opportunities for making neighborhood friendships, enhanced by attendance at the local school and to be prepared for living and working in society as adults" (Wilgosh, 1993, P.323). The outcome of efforts by

parents and educators who advocate for inclusive experiences for all children has been a movement toward more inclusive educational experiences for all children. For example, Alberta Education (1993) policy states, "Educating students with exceptional needs in regular classrooms shall be the first placement option considered by school boards, in consultation with students, parents/guardians and school staff" (p. 2).

While the impetus for integration or inclusion has come from advocates for children with disabilities, and movement toward inclusive education for all children will directly impact on all other groups of children with special needs, including those children whose special educational needs come from their having special gifts and talents. Thus, the principles of inclusive education bear scrutiny from the perspective of the educational needs of gifted and talented children (Sohnle, 1994).

The second author identified four domains of impact of inclusive education. These domains are representative of both the philosophical and practical

positions of current noted proponents of inclusive education. These "expert" perspectives can be clustered into a hierarchy of effects of inclusive education ranging from societal to individual effects.

At the level of society and societal change, Keating (1992) has argued that every-day normative experiences for all individuals will lead to positive societal changes, and that we cannot tolerate the notion that some children do not belong. Gartner (1992) has also argued that segregated educational experiences are not equal. Both of these perspectives deal with societal values. The inclusion model, then, becomes one of all children learning together to develop tolerance and understanding to make better citizens and a better society. Where does this place the gifted child, whose gifts and talents can be viewed as having the potential for making an outstanding contribution to the society if allowed to fully develop in an appropriate setting?

Prominent advocates of special programs for gifted children caution that excellence should not be sacrificed in the name of equity (Gallagher, 1991a; Renzulli & Reis, 1991), and that "equality of opportunity does not mean the same opportunity" (Clark, 1992, P.

63). Provision of special programs of study to develop exceptional potential is not undemocratic (consider athletics and the fine arts) (Fetterman, 1988; Miller & Miller, 1980); in fact, it promotes societal "economic self-interest" and "enlightened self-interest" (Gallagher, 1991b).

An educational system geared to the average results in low levels of achievement among college-bound students and poor academic performance by high-ability grade school students compared to international peers (Feldhusen & Moon, 1992; Renzulli & Reis, 1991; Tomlinson & Callahan, 1992). A school based on democratic principles "must not refuse gifted students the right to educational experiences appropriate to their level of development" (Clark, 1992, p. 65). In today's competitive global market, no society can afford to suppress the full development of potential expertise and talent in its most creative and gifted children and youth.

Thus a model of full inclusion cannot be rationalized for gifted students, and alternative program options are required for the pursuit of excellence and the full development of potential interests and abilities.

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At the level of school organization and functioning, and the level of the community of the school, Skrtic (1992) suggested that there must be radical and fundamental changes such that the educational bureaucracy is replaced by a problem-solving adhocracy, whereby education is deconstructed and re-constructed to meet the needs of all students. Other proponents of inclusive education are not quite so radical in their proposals, but nonetheless advocate for dramatic changes in schools and schooling. Stainback and Stainback (1992) would include all students with disabilities in regular classrooms with their peer. Wang (1992) would have a common curriculum for all students, including those with mild disabilities. For Skrtic(1992), disabilities are organizational pathologies requiring fundamental change to the organization. Skrtic's model would presumably accommodate the individual needs of all students, but would he say that giftedness and special talents are an organizational creation and would be defined in different ways within an educational adhocracy? Can we justify a

common curriculum for all children, including gifted and talented children in Wang's model?

The implications for gifted education of the movement for reform in education include increased examination of values and educational practices (Gallagher, 1991a), increased recognition of individual student needs, including those associated with giftedness (Treffinger, 1991b), increased need for establishing linkages with general educators and special educators to address major needs in the areas of curriculum, instruction and evaluation (Van Tassel-Baska, 1991), increased efforts to reach out through the establishment of partnerships, mentorships and apprenticeships (Jobagy, 1994) and increased efforts in determining how exemplary gifted education programs and practices might influence the reform movement (Renzulli & Reis, 1991; Tomlinson & Callahan, 1992). There is concern that, "the major focus of the reform movement is on cosmetic administrative changes in the ways in which schools are organized and managed rather than on the essential three-way interaction that takes place among teachers, students, and the material to be learned" (Renzulli & Reis, 1991, p. 26).

Within the field of gifted education, the widely prevalent paradigm rooted in the psychometric tradition and the medical is giving way to a multifaceted, flexible, dynamic, process-oriented paradigm with collaborative involvement at all levels (Feldman, 1992; Treffinger, 1991a). This paradigm shift is consistent with Skrtic's call for a problem-solving adhocery approach in education. However, the new paradigm shift does not eliminate the need for special programming for gifted students.

The research evidence is strong that gifted students benefit most from accelerated and enriched classes grouped by ability (Kulik, 1992; Reis, 1992; Rogers, 1991; Yewchuk, 1994). "The achievement level of such students falls dramatically when they are required to do routine work at a routine pace. No one can be certain that there would be a way to repair the harm that would be done if schools eliminated all programs of enrichment and acceleration." (Kulik, 1993, P. 9). Gifted and talented students have different learning needs than average and below-average learners, including differences in content, pacing and complexity, which cannot be met in regular education classes as ordinarily constituted and organized.

Flexible ability grouping, differentiated curriculum and individualized programs are essential in meeting these needs (Clark, 1992; McFadden, 1994).

At the level of the teacher, as a member of, but as distinct from, the notion of a "school community", inclusion "experts" would redefine the roles and responsibilities of teachers. For Stainback and Stainback (1992), and for Wang (1992) as well, the teacher with special education training becomes a support facilitator to the regular class teacher in the inclusive model of education. Keating (1992) proposes that special educations may need new job descriptions or that there may be a need for new professionals in education. Idol (1992), as well as Wong (1992), would have pull-out services provided by special educators, using a resource room model with brief intensive teaching as needed. Again, at the level of the teaching professional, it can be asked, where does the child with special gifts and talents fit it? Do we want highly skilled educators to focus on development of those unique gifted and talents? Can this be done in brief resource room pull-outs?

Classroom teachers report that it is unrealistic to expect provision of

differentiated instruction according to the educational needs of the gifted child within a fully heterogeneous class (Schaufele & McDonald, 1994). A survey of 7,300 third and fourth grade teachers of regular classrooms across the United States revealed only minor modifications to meet the needs of gifted students; 61% of responding teachers had no staff development of any kind in the area of gifted education (Archambault, Westberg, Brown, Hallmark, Zhang, & Emmons, 1993). A related observational study of gifted and average students in 46 of these classrooms found that 84% of the time gifted students received no instructional or curricular differentiation (Westberg, Archambault, Dobyms, & Salvin, 1993).

These findings held even when a gifted program existed in the school, pointing to the need for modification of the roles of gifted education specialists or other staff development personnel to include providing collaborative assistance and peer consultation in curriculum differentiation for regular classroom teachers.

To enable classroom teachers to attain the skills they need to meet the needs of gifted specialist may

be in order. In addition to serving as a resource to students, gifted specialists may also need to spend significant portions of their time serving as a resource to teachers (Archambault et al., 1993, p. 117).

These recommendations for modification of the roles of gifted education specialists are consistent within inclusive education. However, it is questionable whether this type of support to classroom teachers (which is preferable to no support at all) is sufficient to meet the needs of gifted students in heterogeneous classes. Even an experienced classroom teacher with a graduate degree in gifted education, who knows how to differentiate instruction for gifted learners, finds that the needs of children with learning difficulties dominate classroom instructional time:

My frustration at not being able to adequately challenge the gifted students in my heterogeneous classroom grows each year. With 28 students of varying levels and abilities and special needs, I often find the most neglected are the brightest. Even though I know what to do for these youngsters, I simply do not have the time to provide

the differentiated instruction they need and deserve. Instead, my attention shifts, as it has in the past, to the students in my class with special learning problems who are already terribly behind in second grade (Morgan, quoted in Renzulli & Reis, 1991, p. 33).

At the level of the individual child, it has been argued that full inclusion (Stainback & Stainback, 1992) will serve to develop tolerance and understanding of children for other children who are different, to the benefit of the society at large. Children with disabilities will form friendships with other children, and peers with higher levels of skill development can serve as peer tutors to those with less well-developed skills (Villa & Thousand, 1991). Both groups will be developing attitudes, skills, and knowledge which will make them better members of a better society. While it would be difficult to argue against friendships of children with different skills and talents, one can ask whether it is in the best interest of children with special skills and knowledge to spend some of their time as peer supporters and tutors, at possible expense of their own knowledge and skills acquisition.

Presumably one crucial issue here is what skills and knowledge are relevant for our evolving societal needs and values.

Parents of our brightest students often complain that their children are subjected to classroom instruction and practice of skills which they have already mastered (Chinchilla, 1994; Rankin, 1994). Reis et al. (1992) report that teachers can eliminate 50% of the grade level curriculum for gifted students without lowering their performance on achievement tests. Basal textbooks which have been "dumbed down" by two grade levels of difficulty over the last decade and a half with the average student in mind, are often inappropriate for gifted students (Renzulli & Reis, 1991). Is it any wonder that gifted students often find school boring and unstimulating?

Like all other students, gifted children attend school to learn, not to teach. It is inappropriate to require quick learners to tutor others simply because they have free time on their hands. Tutoring classmates in basic skills does not provide the opportunity for developing potential to the fullest extent possible. "You don't produce future Thomas Edison or Marie Curies by forcing them

to spend large amounts of their science and mathematics classes tutoring students who don't understand the material" (Renzulli & Reis, 1991, p. 34). Gifted students resent being placed in the role of "junior teacher" (Gallagher, Coleman, & Nelson, 1993).

Advocates of inclusive education would include all children, including those with gifts and talents, in the regular classroom (Sapon-Shevin, 1992). We have shown in this paper, however, that from societal, school, teacher and individual perspectives, there are valid concerns about the provision of appropriate differentiated programs for gifted children in inclusive classrooms. The educational needs of gifted children are more likely to be met through the maintenance of program options providing challenging, enriched environments and stimulating interaction with intellectual peers (Clark, 1992).

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