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Teacher Training: What the Research Says

- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of teachers in a national sample reported that their education courses or teacher preparation programs focused either very little or not at all on how to best teach academically advanced students. Nearly six in ten (58%) also said that they have had no professional development over the past few years that specifically focused on teaching these students. [1a]
- Sixty-one percent of approximately 7300 randomly selected third and fourth grade teachers in public and private schools in the United States reported that they had never had any training in teaching gifted students. The major finding of this study is that classroom teachers make only minor modifications on a very irregular basis in the regular curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students. This result was consistent for all types of schools sampled and for classrooms in various parts of the country and for various types of communities. [1b]
- Systematic observations conducted in 46 third or fourth-grade classrooms with two students, one high-ability student and one average-ability student, found that little differentiation in the instructional and curricular practices, including grouping arrangements and verbal interactions, for gifted students in the regular classroom. In all content areas in 92 observation days, gifted students rarely received instruction in homogeneous groups (only 21% of the time), and targeted gifted students experienced no instructional or curricular differentiation in 84% of the instructional activities in which they participated. [2]
- The use of curriculum compacting was examined to modify the curriculum and eliminate previously mastered work for high ability/gifted students. When classroom teachers eliminated between 40-50% of the previously mastered regular curriculum for high ability students, no differences were found between students whose work was compacted and students who did all the work in reading, math computation, social studies and spelling. Almost all classroom teachers learned to use compacting, but needed coaching and help to substitute appropriately challenging options. [3a]
- Research was conducted in 12 different third and seventh-grade reading classrooms in both urban and suburban school districts over a 9-month period. Results indicated that little purposeful or meaningful differentiated reading instruction was provided for talented readers in any of the classrooms. Above-grade level books were seldom available for these students in their classrooms, and they were not often encouraged to select more challenging books from the school library. Talented readers seldom encountered challenging reading material during regular classroom instruction. Even less advanced content and instruction was made available for urban students than for suburban. [3b]
- Teachers and principals admitted that academically diverse populations receive very little, if any, targeted attention in their schools. Teachers report the use of little differentiation for gifted middle school students. Both principals and teachers hold beliefs that may deny challenge to advanced middle school students, as the overwhelming majority believe that these students are more social than academic. Half of the principals and teachers believe that middle school learners are in a plateau learning period when little new learning takes place—a theory which supports the idea that basic skills instruction, low level thinking, and small assignments are appropriate. [4]

- Cooperative learning opportunities do not usually challenge gifted and talented students and should not be substituted for specialized programs and services for academically talented students. A lack of attention to the needs of gifted students may result when cooperative learning is used for this population, who often require more advanced content and faster pacing. [5]
- Half of the 35 students who participated in a longitudinal study conducted in an urban high school were underachieving in school. Some of the high achieving students also experienced periods of underachievement in school. Talented students who achieve in school acknowledged the importance of being grouped together in honors and advanced classes for academically talented students. Underachievement for the other students began in elementary school when they were not provided with appropriate levels of challenge and never learned to work. [6][7]
- Approximately 5% of a large, national sample of gifted students dropped out of high school. Gifted students left school because they were failing school, didn't like school, got a job, or were pregnant, although there are many other related reasons. Many gifted students who dropped out of school participated less in extracurricular activities. Many gifted students who dropped out of school were from low SES families and racial minority groups, and had parents with low levels of education. [8]

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