Differentiation Tools with *All* Students in Mind: Including Gifted and Talented Learners

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Introduction

The needs of gifted and talented students are often forgotten or neglected in mixed ability classrooms to the detriment of educational inclusivity. Gifted and talented students, however, make up approximately 6.70% of the student population nationally (Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). Not all states identify gifted and talented students, and if states do make this designation, many students could still go unidentified. Black, Hispanic, and Native American students continue to be underrepresented in gifted programming (Hodges et al., 2018). Gifted and talented students are those that excel within the following categories: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, virtual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability (Marland, 1971). Teachers may not perceive gifted and talented students as requiring support; however, gifted students have unique needs and, therefore, being intentional about meeting the needs of gifted and talented students is important to ensuring *all* students within a classroom are successful (Clark, 2013; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005).

Differentiation is a tool that could be utilized to meet the educational needs of all students in the classroom, including gifted students (Marland, 1971; Tomlinson, 2014). Profoundly gifted students may exhibit specific traits in the mixed ability setting (e.g., isolationists, risk avoiders, task avoiders) (Schultz, 2018). By differentiating instruction to specifically include gifted learners in both high school and college classrooms, we increase inclusivity in the learning space at all learning levels.

Content

The workshop will be split into three sections, each described below. Defining gifted and talented learners provides context to the conversation, setting the stage for including gifted and talented learners in the discussion about differentiation tools. The content will be applicable for the secondary and post-secondary levels, and because of the probability of teaching in online formats due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants will be invited to think about the content using an online learning platform.

Presentation Section 1: Defining Gifted and Talented

This portion will introduce national and state definitions of gifted and talented with a brief discussion about legislation governing this group of students. Barbara Clark's characteristics charts in her textbook Growing Up Gifted (2013) will be utilized to highlight giftedness as it relates to cognitive, affective, physical/sensing, and intuitive functions. With each characteristic, Clark provides associated needs and possible problems that could occur if the need is unmet. In this presentation section, we will explore both the needs and potential challenges.

Presentation Section 2: The Backbone of Differentiation

In this presentation section, we will introduce Tomlinson's flow chart of differentiation, including differentiating by content, process, and product (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). Examples will be given for each and will be framed for teaching at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Participants will be encouraged to think about potential differentiation possibilities within the context of their academic discipline and associated learning objectives.

Presentation Section 3: Tiered Lessons

In the final presentation section, we will further break down Tomlinson's work to understand differentiating by student readiness, interest, and learning profile. We will put this theory into practice by learning how to group students by readiness and/or interest and create tiered lessons utilizing this strategy. The steps outlined in "Tiered Lessons: One Way to Differentiate Mathematics Instruction" (Pierce & Adams, 2004) will be discussed with opportunities for participants to adapt the new knowledge to their discipline area.

Structure of the Presentation

This presentation will be on Zoom, so teachers will be introduced to the various Zoom features that will be used during the workshop (e.g., breakout rooms, chat, mute). First, there will be time to share personal experiences from educators at the high school and college levels exploring the following question: Was there a time when a student's ability level surprised you? Responses will be gathered using the chat function and I will read a few to the group. Next, there will be time for the PowerPoint presentation on the differentiation content. Then participants will be divided into breakout rooms and asked to work in groups to create an example of a tiered lesson, differentiating based on readiness or interest. After the breakout groups, we will return as one large group to share materials that were created in groups. To wrap up the discussion, participants will be asked to type questions in the chat feature for a brief question and answer session for the remaining five minutes.

Expected Participant Outcomes

Participants will leave the workshop with tools they can implement in their classrooms, including a new way to think about differentiation that involves the needs of gifted and talented learners. Participants should be able to describe who gifted and talented learners are within the context of their discipline, articulating characteristics that merit being identified as gifted and talented. Also, participants will be able to propose possible differentiation tools to meet the associated needs of gifted students. In total, this presentation is expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive, learner-centered classrooms as participants will be empowered to recognize and address the unique needs of gifted and talented students within their classroom and disciplinary context.

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