



## *Kansas Effective Practices Instructional Toolkit*

Implementing Research and Resources Into Action  
Research Lesson 2: Opportunities to Be Unique & To Work Independently

### **Gifted Students' Faster Pace of Learning**

Brian Start (1989), of Melbourne University, reported that:

- in a mixed ability class the student who is fastest at memorizing information can do so as much as 12 times faster than the slowest student can, and
- with more complex information processing, as in higher order thinking, the fastest student was found to be four times faster than the slowest student.

Their capacity to learn at a faster pace than other students is one of the most commonly cited characteristics of gifted students. This means that they have the capacity to learn the core curriculum more quickly than others, so some form of acceleration or ability grouping may be used to address this need (as may an independent learning contract of some kind).

Sport and music provide numerous examples of talented performers mixing successfully with older students, cooperatively and competitively. Their access to opportunities is determined not by age alone but also by their sporting or musical readiness for advanced practice and performance.

#### **Sharpen wits, not resentment**

Expecting gifted students to 'tread water' while others complete tasks is likely to dampen their enthusiasm for school, or to sharpen their resentment.

The highly gifted Year 4 boy who stabbed his teacher in the buttocks with a pair of scissors provides a pointed warning to us all, for the ultimate cause of this unacceptable outburst was his school's failure to recognize his high potential, advanced knowledge base and faster pace of learning (Pears, 1991).

That student's frustration did not excuse his behavior, but it does help us to understand it.

Another gifted 8-year-old, Iain, expressed his frustration with the inappropriate (for him) pace of learning via the following poem, written in the early 1990s (note his use of repetition to convey his feeling of what school seemed like) and pointedly titled 'School is as a Waiting Game':

School is as a waiting game,  
waiting,  
waiting for the time when the game has  
gone for long enough  
and I will play my own game  
with no waiting, waiting,  
except for waiting for  
tomorrow, which will be filled  
with excitement and decisions, ideas and  
anything, anything except waiting, waiting  
as there will be nothing to  
wait for, as the waiting game will have  
ended, and a new game begun, begun.

## **Gifted students' need for like-minded peers**

Gifted students can also find it frustrating when their age peers do not understand their complex thoughts or do not appreciate their advanced knowledge and unusual connections. Having at least some time (preferably each day) to work in groups with others of similar ability will enhance their enjoyment of school, as well as their learning.

A concern is often expressed that other students will be disadvantaged if gifted students are not available as role models in mixed ability classes. However, it has been found (Schunk 1987, cited by Benbow 1998) that the most powerful role models are those who are similar to or just a little better than ourselves.

The 5-year-old who used his first 'news' session to tell his mixed-ability class about the periodic table from chemistry was neither an inspiration to the others nor welcomed by them as a result of his obvious difference. It is very difficult for teachers to meet the needs of such highly gifted students in mixed ability settings.

If you prefer research evidence, Kulik noted that students of lower and average ability tend to have higher self-concepts when ability grouped than in mixed ability classes, while the self-concepts of high-ability students seem to be lowered a little by ability grouping - 'perhaps an appropriate dose of humility' (Davis & Rimm 2004, p. 13).

Interaction with others of similar high ability can help gifted students learn to work hard, and to cope with having to struggle sometimes. If they experience only mixed ability settings, gifted students often learn to coast along and to achieve success without much effort. This does not prepare them for coping positively with difficult problems or setbacks later in their education or their adult life (Betts and Neihart 1988, p. 249, re their Type I gifted students).

## **Social skills**

The grouping together of students with advanced abilities and interests can have a positive effect on their learning of social skills, for such students are less likely to reject them as 'oddballs' or to misunderstand their jokes and ideas.

Some form of ability grouping, whether full- or part-time, is often the 'least restrictive environment' for gifted students, both academically and socially.

## **Gifted Students' Faster Pace of Learning**

This information discusses reasons for gifted students need to learn at a faster pace and to be ability grouped from time to time with other gifted students. The article uses student profiles, research, and brief explanations to help the reader understand.