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Talented and gifted programs in the middle school : critical components

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Abstract

As middle school educators and teachers of the gifted and talented continue to debate issues such as equity vs. excellence, homogeneous vs. heterogeneous grouping, and cognitive vs. affective education, the needs of gifted and talented middle school students in the general education classroom appear to be ignored. This paper reviewed current literature relating to the needs of gifted and talented pre-adolescents in the middle school setting in order to determine what were the critical components necessary for meeting their unique needs in the general education classroom. From the reviewed literature, critical components identified include content differentiation, teaching strategies, grouping for instruction, and addressing the social-emotional needs of acceptance and self-esteem. The paper closes with a discussion of conclusions which may be drawn from the literature and recommendations for further study.

TALENTED AND GIFTED PROGRAMS IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL:

CRITICAL COMPONENTS

A Graduate Review

Submitted to the

Division of Education of the Gifted

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Patricia R. Kayser

August, 1997

This Review by: Patricia R. Kayser

Titled: TALENTED AND GIFTED PROGRAMS IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL:

      CRITICAL COMPONENTS

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

6/12/97

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Abstract

As middle school educators and teachers of the gifted and talented continue to debate issues such as equity vs. excellence, homogeneous vs. heterogeneous grouping, and cognitive vs. affective education, the needs of gifted and talented middle school students in the general education classroom appear to be ignored. This paper reviewed current literature relating to the needs of gifted and talented preadolescents in the middle school setting in order to determine what were the critical components necessary for meeting their unique needs in the general education classroom. From the reviewed literature, critical components identified include content differentiation, teaching strategies, grouping for instruction, and addressing the social-emotional needs of acceptance and self-esteem. The paper closes with a discussion of conclusions which may be drawn from the literature and recommendations for further study.

Acknowledgements

To Dr. William Waack, I extend my sincere gratitude for sharing his time, knowledge and expertise in this effort. His continued persistence, patience, and encouragement assisted me in reaching far beyond my expectations in this endeavor.

It is with sincere appreciation that I acknowledge Dr. Mary Selke whose continued faith, forgiveness, and relentless efforts assisted in the realization of a Master of Arts degree. Without her ever-present optimism and motivation this goal could not have been accomplished.

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CHAPTER 1

Problem and Purpose

Since the publication of the national education report, Nation at Risk (U. S. Department of Education, 1983) educators have begun to take a serious look at the make-up of American schools. A more recent report, America 2000, (U. S. Department of Education, 1991), has prompted a movement to bring about profound changes in the way schools are structured and in the way classrooms operate. These changes include block scheduling, school-to-work initiatives, multi-age classrooms, and middle school reform. One of the more prominent changes has been the restructuring of the middle school, that has for the most part supported the concept of inclusion of gifted and talented students in the general education classroom ("Toward a Common," 1994).

The Problem

The purpose of the middle school movement was to create a school that would help preadolescents make a smooth transition from elementary to high school while going through the complex developmental changes from childhood to adolescence (George & Alexander, 1993). It was a new paradigm which grew out of the concept of the junior high school, a product of the last half of this century. Junior high schools originally were designed to offer programs which would meet the academic and emotional needs of early adolescents (George, Stevenson, Thomason, Beane, 1992). However, in the mid 1960's, junior high schools evolved into little high schools, with academic departmentalization, elective programs focused on specialization, and rigid ability grouping patterns. In response to this movement William Alexander and other critics began calling for "a school in the middle" that would meet the needs of the preadolescent (George & Alexander, 1993). Thus began the movement toward the middle school philosophy which is increasing in popularity today.

During this same time period, gifted education was struggling to find a place in American education. In 1972 the Marland Report to Congress on gifted and talented education raised the national awareness of the necessity for gifted education in American schools. Since that time most states have mandated or recommended specialized services for gifted students ("Toward a Common," 1994). However, there has been much discussion and debate concerning the efficacy of gifted and talented programs in the school (Burton-Szabo, 1996; Tomlinson, 1992; Tomlinson, 1994).

In 1993 the U. S. Office of Education released National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent which indicated that the needs of gifted and talented students were not being met and that a new paradigm was needed. The following are some of the problems cited: (a) appropriate learning opportunities for gifted and talented learners in middle schools are scattered and uncoordinated, many have been eliminated; (b) most specialized programs for gifted and talented learners are available only a few hours a week; (c) in the regular classrooms, little is done to modify the curriculum and instruction for gifted students.

In the parallel development of these two areas tensions have developed between middle school educators and teachers of the gifted and talented. *Opposing opinions focus on issues such as excellence vs. equity, heterogeneous vs. homogeneous grouping, and cooperative learning* (Tomlinson,1995a).

In spite of apparent disagreements between middle school experts and educators of the gifted and talented, there appear to be shared areas of concern. Tomlinson (1995a) pointed out these common concerns: (a) development of programs that provide challenging learning experiences for all students; (b) instruction that is relevant to the learner and encourages creative and critical thinking; (c) emphasis on the affective as well as cognitive welfare of students.

Coleman (1995), Gallagher (1992), Tomlinson (1995a), and VanTassel-Baska (1992), as well as many others, have provided many insights related to meeting the needs of gifted middle school students. However, from a preview of the literature it became evident that there was little, if any, literature identifying the critical components for meeting the needs of the gifted and talented middle school students in the general education classroom. In fact, Tomlinson (1992), when looking at ten texts on middle school, established that no references to gifted education were made, with the exception of two texts that mentioned gifted students when referring to the grouping of students. The writer of this paper found the same to be true when examining texts on middle schools in the Rod Library at the University of Northern Iowa.

As a teacher of middle level students in a school where no formal gifted and talented program is in place, the author of this review was very interested in identifying those components which are critical for meeting the needs of gifted and talented students in her classroom. Therefore, an examination concerning the views of middle school educators and experts in the field of gifted and talented was begun, considering the opinions of both while attempting to determine the critical components for meeting the needs of gifted and talented middle school students in the general education classroom.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to review the literature related to the middle school and to the education of the gifted and talented to determine the critical components necessary for program development that will meet the unique needs of the gifted and talented students in the middle school general education classroom. In order to accomplish this goal, the review was organized around the following questions:

1. What components of curriculum development are necessary to meet the needs of the gifted and talented middle school student in the general education classroom?

2. What components are necessary to address the social-emotional needs of gifted and talented middle school student in the general education classroom?

Methodology

A review of the literature was initiated in the following areas: gifted, middle school, and general education. The author conducted an ERIC search using the descriptors gifted, middle school, and general education. This elicited very few responses so the descriptors were changed from general education to regular classroom. This improved the field of choices. A search of the Donald O. Rod Library at the University of Northern Iowa for books which addressed the subjects of gifted, middle school, and general education or regular classroom was completed. Another source used was Worldnet.ATT on the Internet, where a connection to a service called "ASLN" based at the Center for Science and Technology, Syracuse University provided a list of relevant documents through "Ask ERIC".

Additional sources included bibliographies contained in various articles and books examined as part of the research. The articles and books were then given an identifying number and arranged according to topics. An outline of pertinent information was developed, notes were recorded from the resources, and organized in subject areas.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to a review of the literature on talented and gifted programs in middle schools which was published from 1983 to the present. The review was limited to this time span because this was the era when significant changes in educational policies concerning middle schools, gifted programs, and general education classrooms took place.

Definitions

For the purposes of this review of the literature the following terms are used:

General education refers to the educational curriculum practices used for the majority of students in schools, including all basic core curriculum requirements (VanTassel-Baska, 1992).

Gifted and talented refers to children or whenever applicable, youth, who are identified at the preschool, elementary, or secondary level as possessing demonstrated or potential abilities that give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, specific academic, or leadership ability, or in the performing and visual arts, and who by reason thereof, require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school (Marland, 1972).

Middle school is a school usually including grades 6-8 or 5-8, or even 7-8, intended to help the early adolescents of these grades make a smooth transition from elementary to high school and from childhood to adolescence (George & Alexander, 1993).

The underachieving gifted student is one who shows exceptional performance on a measure of intelligence and who, nevertheless, does not perform as well as expected for students of the same age on school-related tasks (Clark, 1988).

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

This review of the literature focuses on middle school and the education of the gifted and the talented in order to determine the critical components for program development which would meet the unique needs of gifted and talented students in the general education classroom. The review centers around the following questions: (1) What components of curriculum development are necessary to meet the needs of gifted and talented middle school students in the general education classroom? (2) What components are necessary to address the social/emotional needs of gifted and talented middle school students in the general education classroom?

Necessary Curriculum Components

While researching the literature on curriculum development for gifted students in the general education classroom, three key areas of concern seemed to emerge: content differentiation,   teaching strategies, and grouping for instruction (Maker, 1993; Tomlinson, 1994; VanTassel-Baska, 1994). Although a number of concerns surfaced, these curricular issues appeared to be identified as critical to meeting the needs of gifted and talented student in the middle school general education classroom.

Content Differentiation

Content differentiation is the process of altering content in a lesson to fit the varying needs of students in the general education classroom (Parke, 1989). While some students may be ready for more complex, abstract, and independent approaches to information, others might still need more simple and concrete approaches to the same content (Tomlinson, 1995b).

When addressing content differentiation for gifted students, Joyce VanTassel-Baska (1994) pointed out that "Differentiation for any population is grounded in differential standards of performance at a given period of time" (p. 8). She further stated that this model "holds promise" for gifted learners since the level and pace of instruction can be adjusted for their needs. Tomlinson (1995b) agreed when she stated that curriculum for the gifted must be "qualitatively different from the core curriculum" in order for gifted students to reach their academic potential. Concerning gifted and talented students Barbara Clark (1993) stated: "Their learning is different; their pace is different; their understanding of issues, content, relationship, and innovation is different" (p.1).

According to VanTassel-Baska (1994), since gifted preadolescents often have a need to study a topic of interest in great depth, differentiated curriculum for the gifted should focus on higher-level thinking, interdisciplinary approaches , and an emphasis on student-centered learning. The Leadership Training Institute for Gifted/Talented (LTI) proposes a list of principles for differentiating instruction for the gifted and talented that has become somewhat of a benchmark for the development of gifted programs (Kaplan, 1979). Among the suggestions listed are theme-based programs, interdisciplinary curricula, in-depth learning experiences, development of learner independence and self-understanding, and a focus on process.

Coleman & Gallagher (1992) conducted a survey of approximately 400 middle school and gifted and talented educators. The results provided enlightenment concerning several issues, including curricular modification. Both middle school and gifted and talented educators responding to the survey identified curriculum differentiation as a major factor contributing to program success. They further agreed that the regular middle school curriculum was not challenging enough for gifted and talented students. As a result of this study, Coleman and Gallagher recommended the planning of collaborative interdisciplinary curriculum development which would include strategies to

ensure an appropriate pace and a challenging level of learning for gifted and talented middle school students.

Susan Winebrenner (1992) appeared to agree with this recommendation when she said that a teacher's responsibility is to teach the content and to make sure students learn something new each day. She further stated that with differentiation in the regular classroom the educational needs of students, including the gifted can be met. VanTassel-Baska (1992) concurred when stating that differentiated instruction is provided for all students, including the gifted, when curriculum allows for individual differences in learning rates, interests, and achievement levels.

Tomlinson (1995a) pointed out that preadolescents differ in readiness, interest, and learning profiles and middle schools must attempt to meet each student's needs. She added that differentiated instruction appears to be a solution for meeting the academic diversity of middle school students.

In summary, the reviewed literature on gifted and talented middle schools students appeared to suggest that differentiation of content is a critical component for meeting the needs of these students in the general education classroom. Since gifted and talented students learn rapidly, with the ability to develop understanding between ideas, content should be provided to encourage and enable the development of these learning characteristics.

Teaching Strategies

Several teaching strategies supported by middle school educators seem to be appropriate for gifted learners. Leaders in gifted education support strategies such as student choice regarding learning experiences, emphasis on higher levels of thinking, and inclusion of the affective side of learning (Shore, Cornell, Robinson, & Ward, 1991). Although there is agreement with some strategies, Benjamin Bloom (1985,) cautioned ". . . exceptional levels of development require certain types of environmental support, special

experiences, excellent teaching, and appropriate motivational encouragement at each stage of development" (p. 543).

James Gallagher, in his paper "Gifted Students and Educational Reform" (1992), named four strategies that are necessary to accommodate the needs of gifted learners: acceleration - bringing more complex matters to the student earlier; enrichment - providing students with special topics in greater depth in such studies as history, geography, language arts, and science; sophistication - engaging in more complex networks of concepts or theories; and novelty - unique programs such as interdisciplinary studies. Gallagher further cautioned that failure to use appropriate strategies for instruction for gifted students may lead to student boredom, lack of interest in education, and possibly a rejection of higher education.

Individualization, as defined by Clark (1983) is "a way of organizing learning experiences so that the rate, content, schedule, experiences, and depth of exploration available to all students stem from their assessed needs and interests" (p. 215). This framework for program planning is advocated by many gifted education experts as necessary for appropriate instruction for gifted and talented students in the general education classroom (Clark,1988; Feldhusen, 1990; Parke, 1989; & Milgram,1989).

Curriculum Compacting

A strategy for individualizing instruction that can be used in all classrooms, middle school included, is curriculum compacting (Tomlinson, 1995a). This system is designed to adapt the regular curriculum to meet the needs of students by either eliminating work that has been previously mastered or streamlining work that can be mastered at an accelerated pace (Renzulli, 1994).

Curriculum compacting involves a three step process that (1) assesses what a student knows about material to be studied and what the student still needs to master, (2) plans for learning what is not known and excuses students

from what is known, and (3) plans for freed-up time to be spent in enriched or accelerated study (Reis , Burns, & Renzulli, l992). This process simply follows the natural, logical pattern general education teachers would use for individualizing instruction (Reis & Renzulli,1992).

Winebrenner (1992) explained that, through the use of curriculum compacting, gifted and talented students can be given credit for what they already know and can then be given the opportunity to choose enrichment activities that will capitalize on individual strengths. She further states that the work teachers plan for students is the teacher's work; however, when students are able to make choices about what they do in the classroom, the work becomes their own and true learning takes place.

Cooperative learning

A solution to meet the academic needs of gifted and talented students offered by Toepfer (1992) and other middle school experts is the strategy of cooperative learning. Toepfer contends that this is the best remedy for grouping in the middle school because it allows students to learn better in terms of their own rate.

However, gifted and talented learners in heterogeneous cooperative learning groups often assume the role of teacher rather than learner (Feldhusen,1990). Robinson (1990) stated that, while some students enjoy this role, many get frustrated with trying to teach and motivate less able and less willing students in their group. Tomlinson (1994) contends that cooperative learning does benefit gifted students in regard to working in teams and cooperation, but it neither stretches their capacities as learners and thinkers nor encourages excellence in these students.

Coleman, Gallagher, and Nelson (1993) conducted a quantitative research study to look at programs that offered excellent examples of how cooperative learning could be successfully blended with gifted and talented education. The study used five schools, one combined elementary, middle

school, and high school, two middle schools, and two elementary schools. Research sites were chosen for their use of a variety of cooperative learning models and having a strong gifted and talented program in place. The results of this research study confirmed that the needs of gifted and talented students can be met by using the cooperative learning format. It also determined that the success of these programs was accomplished through careful planning and much effort. Major commitment to the use of cooperative learning with support for intense staff development, planning time, and long-term work in cooperative learning, and a conscious effort to meet the needs of gifted students seemed to contribute to the success of the program.

Coleman and Gallagher (1995) acknowledged that cooperative learning has much to offer teachers and students, and this includes gifted students. They also stated that collaboration and cooperative efforts between proponents of gifted education and educators advocating cooperative learning can, and should, lead to successful experiences for all.

Teaching models as strategies

Some models, such as Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Model (1977) and the Schoolwide Enrichment Program (Reis & Renzulli, 1985), have been implemented as strategies to meet the unique needs of gifted and talented students in the general education classroom. In the Triad Model, for example, the recommended Type I exploratory activities and Type II skill process activities are educational experiences that are appropriate for all students. However, for appropriate use of the model for gifted students, the activities in Type I and Type II must lead to and support Type III activities, which are the investigation of real problems.

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model, offers a systematic set of specific strategies for increasing student effort, enjoyment and performance and for integrating a broad range of advanced learning experiences and higher order thinking skills (Renzulli & Reis,1985). The goals of this model include promoting

excellence throughout the entire school, integrating the curriculum, and providing accelerated instruction for a larger portion of the school.

Multiple intelligences theory

Another strategy suggested by Tomlinson (1995b) uses the theory of multiple intelligence (MI theory), developed by Howard Gardner, to accommodate student interest. Gardner (1983) suggested that there are seven basic intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. In his later work, The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach (1991), Gardner urged educators to be aware that students may learn more easily when they use their strongest intelligences. He further stated that learning experiences that match learners' intelligences will be more natural, inviting, and productive for students.

From the reviewed literature dealing with teaching strategies, one might reach the tentative conclusion that individualization is the key element in teaching strategies for meeting the needs of gifted and talented middle school students in the general education classroom. The reviewed literature included various teaching strategies such as curriculum compacting, the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1985), and Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory (1983). All of these seemed to be consonance with the philosophies of both middle school and gifted and talented education. In the case of cooperative learning, however, a divergence of viewpoints was evident. Middle school educators viewed this strategy in a highly positive manner, while gifted and talented educators had major reservations concerning its effectiveness.

Grouping

Grouping high ability students in settings with differentiated curriculum has long been a practice in gifted education (Tomlinson, 1992). According to

Kulik (1990), gifted students show positive gains in achievement as a result of homogenous grouping. Feldhusen, Van Tassel-Baska, and Seeley (1989) pointed out that homogeneous grouping provided to facilitate instruction at appropriate levels can be an effective means of assisting in delivery of instruction. Much research (Kulik & Kulik, 1990; Allan, 1991; Davis & Rimm, 1985; Tuttle, 1983) espouses the use of homogenous grouping by ability for gifted students in specific subjects, with provisions for movement between and among groups, while using content that is appropriate to their needs.

However, Johnson and Markle (1986) contend that ability grouping for instruction is not supported by research and is contrary to middle school philosophy. Slavin (1987) and Oakes (1985) feel that no one profits from homogeneous grouping. They state that ability-grouping repeatedly has been found to be ineffective for increasing student achievement and has the potential for the greatest harm of all grouping plans.

Prominent middle school experts such as George (1988) and Lounsbury (1988) have followed this lead. In addition, the National Association of Secondary Principals ("Toward excellence," 1987) and the National Middle School Association (1989) have strongly encouraged the use of heterogeneous grouping.

Although there is strong support for heterogeneous grouping among middle school educators, Pamela Sicola (1990) points out that the literature on middle schools does show some room for grouping of high ability students. George (1988), a middle school expert who is highly supportive of heterogeneous grouping, does concede that students should be grouped by ability in subject (e.g. mathematics and reading) in which reducing heterogeneity is important. His Spring, 1987 study of selected middle schools found that 33% of the respondents supported grouping for students with special needs, including gifted students.

Coleman, Gallagher, and Howard (1992) researched five middle school sites that were carefully chosen for their strong programs in both middle school

and gifted and talented education. In all five schools some form of ability and/or performance grouping of students was used. Two schools did so in spite of a policy difference between the school and the central administration. The grouping was implemented because it seemed to be the most effective way to provide a challenging program for the advanced students while working to meet the instructional needs of all students.

Coleman, Gallagher, and Howard (1993) pointed out that many schools are considering dropping honors classes and/or classes for gifted and talented students. They felt that this is due to the   strong statements by some proponents of the middle school movement regarding the importance of heterogeneous grouping as an essential element to middle school programs. They stated: "Based upon what we have seen here, such actions seem to be premature and may even be reckless" (p. 60).

A recent statement by Paul George strengthens this statement even further:

> Without detracting from the importance of achieving equity in education, it is only fair to point out that no group - nor individual student - should be expected to sacrifice an excellent education so that others might do better. We must find ways for high-ability, high achieving learners to do their very best in the context of an inclusive school: characterized by diversity and heterogeneity (Greensboro New and Record, 1995, p. F1).

To summarize, from looking at the reviewed literature, the issue of grouping students for instruction seems to have strong differences of opinions between middle school educators and gifted and talented experts. Eliminating ability grouping and using heterogeneous grouping appears to be the practice of choice by the middle school experts. However, many experts in the field of gifted and talented education do not agree and, furthermore, they recommend ability grouping for instructional purposes. The reviewed literature also seemed to indicate that flexibility in grouping practices should be exercised to assure that the needs of all students, gifted and talented included, are being met.

Social-Emotional Needs

Early adolescence is a difficult period of growth when youth are attempting to achieve independence, discover personal identity and self-esteem, and develop meaningful interpersonal relationships (George & Alexander, 1993). Clark (1988) states that gifted and talented adolescents, with their ability to conceptualize, to see alternatives, to seek out variant patterns and relationships, to express themselves in fulfilling ways, may be better equipped to meet the social-emotional challenges of this period. However, she cautions that these very qualities can lead to some unique problems.

After reviewing the literature on meeting the social-emotional needs of gifted and talented middle school students, two areas which appeared to be of critical concern were acceptance and self-esteem (Clark, 1988; Van Tassel-Baska, 1992; Willis,1995). Although these concerns are typical of all preadolescents (George & Alexander, 1993), they seem to be intensified in gifted and talented preadolescents who not only experience the rapid fluctuations in emotions and mood swings characteristic of this age group, but also have interspersing periods of exceptional maturity and amazing insight (Clark, 1988).

Acceptance

In his hierarchy of human needs Maslow (1968) identified belonging as one of the needs necessary for people of all ages. However, gifted and talented students who see themselves as different from others tend to have a sense of not belonging (Clarke, 1988). These students want to be part of the group; but, often because they are noticeably different, they feel isolated, alienated, and rejected by their age-mates (Schmitz & Galbraith, 1985).

Gifted and talented students have an unusual sensitivity to the expectations and feelings of others which makes them exceptionally vulnerable to criticism and rejection from their peers (Clark, 1983). Because they have an

extreme desire to be accepted by their age -mates, these students often become embarrassed by being label "gifted and talented" (Calhoun & Casey, 1995). Toepfer (1989) states that these labeled students who feel they do not "fit in" at school or within a peer group may become frustrated and depressed.

An environment where emphasis on cliques, the right kind of clothes, and fashionable hairdos is often a foreign place to the gifted and talented preadolescent who is having difficulty acquiring a sense of belonging (Rakow, 1989). Likewise, the trends of athleticism and social congeniality are admired by the typical middle school students who often criticize those who are studious, a perception which causes much conflict in the gifted and talented student (Clark, 1988).

Gross (1989) explains that gifted and talented students need to feel they belong, to be accepted for their abilities, and to know they are valued by others. He believes that the conflict between the social-emotional needs of acceptance and achievement causes much stress as the gifted preadolescent attempts to weigh the price of achievement against the price of acceptance. He states:

> This, then, may be the central psychological social dilemma of gifted youth. If the gifted child is to satisfy his drive for excellence, he must risk sacrificing the attainment of intimacy with his age peers. If the pursuit of intimacy is his primary need, he must moderate his standards of achievement, conceal, to some extent at least, his intellectual interests, and conform to a value system that may be seriously at variance with his own level of moral development to retain the approval of the group into which he wishes to be accepted. (p. 193)

He then concludes that gifted and talented students should not have to choose between achievement and acceptance, but should be allowed to experience both (Gross, 1989).

Tomlinson (1995a) offers some promising directions that can be taken to resolve the conflict between acceptance and achievement for gifted and talented students within the general education classroom. First, she suggests

educators should recognize that early adolescents share common affective needs but experience them in different ways. Second, she is convinced that middle school educators should plan for both achievement and acceptance for advanced learners.

Davis and Rimm (1985) have concluded that gifted and talented students can experience a sense of belonging when grouped with peers who possess similar abilities. Other experts in the field, such as Coleman and Cross (1988) and Schmitz and Galbraith (1985), describe the importance that gifted and talented students themselves place on being grouped with intellectual peers who provide them the opportunity to excel in a nonthreatening atmosphere. In fact, VanTassel-Baska (1992) states that the opportunity to learn with others of like ability, interest, and temperament, and to be accepted for oneself are major reasons for grouping gifted and talented students with peers who share their abilities.

Some middle school experts (George & Alexander, 1993; Beane, 1993), on the other hand, believe that the needs of early adolescents who are experiencing rapid yet diverse, physical, psychological, and intellectual changes, are better met in a heterogeneous setting. Levy (1988) believes that young adolescents need to take time to explore their feelings with less emphasis on academic interests which eliminates the need for ability grouping. In the article "Mainstreaming the Gifted", Willis (1995) quoted Bessie Duncan, a program supervisor for the Detroit public schools, who stated that surveys show some gifted and talented students like being with their nongifted peers. Duncan further commented that students feel uncomfortable being grouped with the high-ability students, a situation which may cause others to view them as being above the total group.

Sicola (1990) recommended that flexibility in grouping is the key to a positive affective climate in the middle school. She further stated that grouping gifted and talented students in their respective areas of giftedness, while placing them in heterogeneous groups for other areas, is meeting the affective

needs of these students, which is the goal of both middle school and gifted education.

In summary, the reviewed literature states that gifted and talented youth, like all preadolescents need a sense of belonging, to feel accepted by their age-mates. The literature also reveals that acceptance is difficult for gifted and talented preadolescents whose advanced intelligence identifies them as different from nongifted students. A solution suggested by the literature for helping gifted and talented middle school students attain a sense of belonging, while satisfying their need to strive for excellence would be to group them with peers who share their abilities and interests.

Self-esteem

Carl Rogers (1961) described self-concept as an organized arrangement of perceptions of one's characteristics and abilities that develops out of interpersonal relationships. Maslow (1968) listed self-concept needs at the level above the behavior of belonging in his hierarchy of needs. He believed that all students want to experience a healthy evaluation of themselves, for self-respect and self-esteem. Clark (1988) maintained that how we perceive ourselves determines our actions and our beliefs about the world and other people. She further stated that "the view of self determines achievement and enhances or limits the development of a person's potential" (p.108).

When speaking about achievement, Tannebaum (1983) hypothesized that self-esteem and self-concept are directly related to academic success which is a primary concern of gifted and talented students. Leroux (1986) agreed when she stated that gifted and talented students must experience meaningful achievement to develop a healthy sense of identity.

Although studies (e. g., Coleman & Fults, 1983; Van Tassel-Baska, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Kulieke, 1994) indicated that self-esteem tends to be high among gifted and talented students, the opposite may be true for those who are

not academically challenged (Tomlinson, 1994). Henjum (1983) expressed concern that academically gifted and talented middle school students do not receive the intellectual stimulation or the emotional and social support they need to reach their full potential. Moreover, Rakow (1989) cautioned that the inability of gifted and talented students to contribute to the solutions of world problems may result in affective destruction.

According to some researchers, one of the leading problems associated with low self-concept among gifted and talented preadolescents appears to be underachievement (VanTassel-Baska, Olszewski-Kubilius & Kulieke, 1994). The preadolescent so indentified is likely to demonstrate low achievement in general classroom coursework but high scores on standardized tests (Rimm, 1987). Rimm states that underachieving gifted and talented individuals possess a low self-concept, feelings of inferiority, and lack of goal integration. Although schools may not be the predominant cause of underachievement in the gifted and talented (Clark, 1988), teachers and administrators can guard against intensifying the problem by valuing academic excellence (Rimm, 1988).

Addressing the issue of academic excellence, Sicola (1990) stated that middle school experts support an affective focus at the expense of academic excellence. She further warns that decreasing academic focus in order to meet social-emotional needs of middle schoolers is not a solution favored by experts in the field of gifted and talented education. Since self-concept and self-esteem are directly related to academic success, it is critical that an academic and an affective focus be maintained (Tannenbaum, 1983).

Antithetically, some middle school experts (Hester & Hester, 1983; Toepfer, 1989) warn educators about the dangers of overchallenging students. Toepfer (1989) stated, "Gifted students who fare poorly from the overchallenge of misplacement during their middle level school years often demonstrate significantly lowered self-concept and self-esteem" (p.104). He further cautioned that middle level educators should ensure that students who are given early learning challenges such as algebra and advanced language arts

have acquired the necessary capacities and skills to adequately master the content.

Rakow (1989) stated that challenging academics is necessary to help gifted and talented adolescents recognize and value their abilities and develop a strong, confident sense of self. Clark (1988) agreed while offering the following recommendations for developing self concept in the general education classroom: consider each student as a unique individual, value every person for the qualities he or she possesses, and allow all students to reach their academic potential.

Tomlinson (1994) contends that middle schools must plan curriculum which emphasizes the academic as well as the self-concept, both necessary for healthy development for all students, including gifted and talented. She adds that developing a healthy self-concept for gifted and talented middle school students is directly related to academic achievement.

In summary, the reviewed literature seemed to indicate that the development of a healthy self-concept for gifted and talented middle school students is directly related to academic achievement. It pointed out that middle school experts support emphasis on affective development while de-emphasizes academic challenge. The research of gifted and talented educators, on the other hand, stressed the need for challenging academics in order for gifted and talented middle school students to develop a strong self-concept. They also indicated that middle schools need to develop programs that emphasize both academic excellence and self-concept in order to assist students in building healthy self-esteem.

CHAPTER III

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Summary

This literature review was initiated to attempt to identify the critical components for meeting the needs of the gifted and talented student in the middle school general education classroom. Through meeting the needs of gifted and talented students: components of curriculum development and addressing the social-emotional needs.

Content differentiation, teaching strategies, and grouping for instruction appeared to be the critical components for curriculum development which would meet the unique needs of gifted and talented middle school students in the general education classroom. Gifted and talented students learn rapidly and have the ability to develop understanding between ideas. Therefore, providing differentiated instruction is critical to meeting their academic needs.

Concerning teaching strategies, the framework for program planning that emerged as critical for meeting the needs of the gifted and talented in the general education classroom is individualization. The reviewed literature suggested several strategies for individualization, including curriculum compacting, cooperative learning, teaching models such as the Enrichment Triad Model and the Schoolwide Enrichment Model, and Gardner's multiple intelligences theory.

The literature on grouping revealed strong opposing views of the educators of the gifted and talented and the middle school experts. Gifted and talented educators espoused the use of ability grouping, at least in those subjects where students are most talented. Antithetically, middle school experts recommended the elimination of ability grouping in favor of heterogeneous groups. Flexibility in grouping, with the goal of grouping for the most

meaningful instruction for all students, appeared to be the solution to this problem, at least for the present.

Two needs that surfaced as critical concerns in the social-emotional area for gifted and talented students in the general education classroom were acceptance and self-esteem. Although all preadolescent experience these needs, the reviewed literature appeared to suggest that they are more intensified in the gifted and talented youth.

The literature reviewed seemed to indicate that gifted and talented students have a difficult time feeling accepted because their advanced intelligence sets them apart from their nongifted age-mates. Most gifted and talented researchers were in agreement that grouping gifted and talented youth in the general education classroom with peers who share the same abilities and interests will help them attain a sense of belonging while satisfying their need to strive for excellence. Middle school educators, on the other hand, believe that gifted and talented students feel more comfortable in heterogeneous settings where they can feel a part of the total group.

The second area of critical concern for addressing the social-emotional needs of gifted and talented students that surfaced from the literature reviewed is that of building a healthy self-concept. Although experts in middle school and gifted and talented educators share the same views concerning the importance of the development of self-concept in preadolescents, there is disagreement among them concerning the use of some strategies to develop self-concept. Some middle school experts believe their is a danger of over challenging preadolescents, causing lowered achievement and lowered self-esteem. Many gifted and talented educators, however, contend that gifted and talented middle school students must experience meaningful achievement in order to develop a healthy self-esteem.

Conclusions

This review of the literature attempted to identify the critical components necessary for program development that would meet the unique needs of gifted and talented students in the middle school general education classroom. From the reviewed literature the writer has concluded that the critical components for curriculum development appear to be content differentiation, teaching strategies, and grouping for instruction. Concerning the social-emotional needs of gifted and talented students in the middle school general education classroom, the necessary components seem to be the development of acceptance and self-esteem. It is well to point out, however, that this conclusion is based upon rather limited resources that deal specifically with the subject of meeting the unique needs of the preadolescent gifted and talented student in the general education classroom. The topic was almost non-existent in the middle school literature that was reviewed. In fact, the only references found in middle school literature related to gifted and talented students dealt with the somewhat controversial topic of ability grouping.

The limited literature may lead to another conclusion: There is little being done to address the unique needs of the preadolescent gifted and talented student in the general education classroom. One might further conclude that middle school experts believe that effective programs for many preadolescents are effective for the gifted and talented preadolescent as well. Middle school educators need to admit the necessity for appropriate acceleration, enrichment and production for gifted and talented students (Tomlinson, 1995a). If the needs of gifted and talented middle school students are to be met in the general education classroom then specific intent and planning must take place by educators both in gifted and talented and in middle school education to accomplish this goal.

There exist divergent philosophies between middle school educators and gifted and talented educators as to how the needs of the gifted and talented preadolescent are being met in the general education classroom. This is

evident particularly in the areas of abilility grouping, which is an equity issue, and in providing challenging academic programs, which is an excellence issue. For the good of this special population, it is necessary for these two groups to come to some consensus using as a basis those areas in which there seems to be common goals.

One of these goals is that schools must develop programs that provide both equity and excellence. All students are entitled to an equal opportunity to learn at the highest possible level ("Toward a Common," 1994). Just as the lower functioning students have special needs in order to be provided equal opportunities in education, so also do the gifted and talented students. They need challenging academics presented in a learning environment with peers who share their interests and abilities. Middle school and gifted and talented experts need to work together to provide programs that allow for both equity and excellence.

The importance of the affective component of instruction for preadolescents is shared by middle school and gifted and talented educators. However, when the affective component is emphasized at the cost of content and academic challenge, the needs of the gifted and talented preadolescent are very likely not being met. To have a positive self-image and a sense of belonging, gifted and talented preadolescents need the opportunity to participate in challenging learning experiences with students who share their abilities and interest. Experts in both fields need to colloborate in order to develop programs that provide for the cognitive and the affective development of preadolescents in the general education classroom.

Recommendations

From the reviewed literature the following recommendations are suggested:

1. There is a need for additional research to identify critical components for meeting the needs of gifted and talented students in the general education

classroom. This might be accomplished by a series of surveys of a large sample of middle school educators and talented and gifted experts to dertermine their perceptions of what such components might be.

2. There should be research to determine the actual extent to which the needs of the gifted and talented middle school preadolescents are being met in the general education classroom. Surveys of large samples of middle school general education classroom teachers in various school contexts would be one procedure that could be proposed.

3. Initiate within a given school district comparative studies of middle schools using ability grouping and heterogeneous grouping to determine the impact upon the academic achievement of identified middle school gifted and talented preadolescents.

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