Chapter 1
Beyond the Stars:
Experiences That Expand the Boundaries of the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

When students are identified for gifted services, one of the first questions asked by parents is, "What will my child be doing that is different from what is being done now?" The purpose of this first chapter is to provide a foundation as the reader proceeds through the following chapters in the book. The chapter presents the characteristics of gifted students along with the ways gifted services are delivered to students at various levels. This chapter, and actually the whole book, looks at ways to meet the needs of gifted students in the K-12 environment. Gifted students need instruction that enriches their conceptual attainment, helps them make connections and patterns between content areas, and develops an understanding of real-life applications of content. The growing availability of technological resources has empowered teachers to meet the academic needs of students and provide an enriched learning experience for all students. The wide range of software has provided gifted students opportunities to independently explore areas that would not be possible in the regular classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine being in a room all day, looking at children's picture books, when you have been uses to reading Shakespeare. Imagine being given large chunky crayons to use in a coloring book when you have been using oil pastels on canvas. Imagine that instead of dancing Swan Lake, you have been told to practice the Hokey Pokey by putting your right foot in and out, over and over. For gifted students, a day in school can seem to be just as stifling. The need to learn, to think creatively, to build, can be a powerful force. When stifled, students devalue themselves. The world loses something when a light is dimmed or turned off.

It becomes a challenge to meet the needs of gifted students. School districts spend a large amount of their resources to identify gifted and talented students to meet the regulatory and reporting requirements of their governing body, only to offer little to no services to them. With national and state funding available to support students with disabilities, the focus of many districts is not on providing an enriched education to those that are ahead of the norm. Rather the focus is to move students that are behind towards the mean and hoping that those that are above the norm can move themselves higher and higher.

BACKGROUND

Visit any school and we would see a few students that stand out academically or with some outstanding talent. They are those students that have an ability that is significantly above the norm for their age. They read way above their grade level; they can perform mathematical computations that amaze their teachers; they have creative abilities that are unreal; or they have insights to areas that a typical student miss. According to Webb, Gore, Amend, and DeVries (2007), some of the characteristics of gifted children occur in their very early years. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) defines giftedness as "...those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10%)." (NAGC, 2019b, p. 1). The domains include general intellect, artistic arts, creative thinking, leadership, or specific discipline. In the United States, each state determines the identification criteria for gifted students. Generally, in schools, the term gifted recognizes exceptionality in aptitude or achievement.

Even with a definition, identifying a gifted student may be difficult. Typically, teachers receive minimal training in the identification of gifted students and are not very adept at identifying gifted children by any means other than high IQ (Miller, 2009). Gender and classroom behavior are often two areas that can bias teachers when identifying student behaviors as gifted indicators. For example, while many males may be identified as being identified as having leadership skills, many girls with the same skills will often be labelled as being a know it all or bossy (Silverman, 2002).

A larger bias appears towards students from diverse backgrounds, students who are not adept at speaking or writing English (English Language Learners: ELL) or students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. (Siegle et al., 2016; Zhbanova, Rule, & Stichter, 2015). Due to bias or lack of knowledge, teachers often do not observe characteristics of giftedness in children from diverse backgrounds. Students in these underserved populations are often ignored in the school setting.

Gifted and talented students who have a disability are referred to as twice exceptional (2E). Identification of 2E students is problematic and identification does not always occur (Bell, Taylor, McCullum, Coles, & Hayes, 2015). Gifted students with either social, behavioral, or emotional problems have been

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