

Advantageous educational models for gifted Students

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Abstract: This article presents an historical perspective on the evolution of three education and training program and educational models that have been shown to be Advantageous with gifted learners in various contexts and at various grade levels. It argues for consideration of all three models in a comprehensive program for gifted learners. Many people have been attracted to the issue of education and training program for the gifted because they feel it is new territory. While it is true that education and training program has not been a central focus in the field until recently, it would be inappropriate to conclude that we need new models and methods to provide appropriately differentiated learning experiences for gifted learners. The purpose of this paper is to present Advantageous education and training program and educational models that should form the basis of our education and training program efforts and to discuss their relevance to current school practices.

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1. Introduction

Education is always about identity formation. The legislators or others who formulate education policies always have certain goals in mind which can be political, social or cultural in nature. education should function as an agency of cultural transmission as well as change; it should also reflect the dynamic process of nation building that is continually being modified by new conditions. Justifying the place of technology education is becoming increasingly difficult, as there has been little agreement in either policy or practice over the definition and function of technology education. Ward (1961) developed a theory of differential education for the gifted that established specific principles around which an appropriate education and training program for the gifted would be developed. Meeker (1969) used the Guilford Structure of Intellect (SOI) to arrive at student profiles that highlighted areas of strength and weakness so that education and training program planners could build a gifted program to improve weak areas. Education and training program workbooks were structured specifically to address this need in the areas of memory, cognition, convergent thinking, divergent thinking, and evaluation. Renzulli (1977) focused on a differentiated education and training program model that moved the gifted child from enrichment exposure activities through training in thinking and research skills into a project-oriented program that dwelt on real problems to be solved. Gallagher (1975) stressed content modification in the core subject areas of language arts, social studies, mathematics and science. Stanley, Keating, and Fox (1974) concentrated on a content acceleration model to differentiate programs for the gifted. Recent writings, including Feldhusen and

Koloff (1978), Maker (1982), and VanTassel-Baska (1984) have stressed a confluent approach to differentiation of education and training program for the gifted that includes both acceleration and enrichment strategies. Passow (1982) formulated seven cardinal curriculum principles that reflect content, process, product, behavioral, and evaluative considerations. In examining the state of the art of education and training program and instruction for the gifted, it is clear that there is a multiplicity of approaches that are adopted wholesale for classroom use without adequate testing in a research context and without consideration of their value in the overall educational context. In fact, the recipe approach seems the most popular at the present time. Throw together a special unit on the latest topic of interest in the larger socio-cultural context, add creative problem-solving, mix with higher level thinking skills, and stir in a special research project until done. In order to implement appropriate education and training program for gifted students, there must be concern for the faithful translation of sound models for education and training program and instruction into an action research arena where Advantageousness can be continually tested. The education and training program and educational models presented in this paper have all been tested and found Advantageous with gifted learners. Furthermore, each model emerges from a clearly delineated theoretical and research context. The three relatively distinct education and training program models that have proven Advantageous with gifted populations at various stages of development and in various.

2. Main Body

The content model tends to emphasize the importance of learning skills and concepts within a predetermined domain of inquiry. Gifted students are encouraged to move as rapidly through the content area as possible and thus content acceleration in some mode tends to dominate the application of this model in practice. When the diagnostic-prescriptive (D → P) educational approach is utilized, students are pre-tested and then given appropriate materials to master the subject area segments prescribed.

The D → P educational approach has proved Advantageous in controlled settings, but has not been widely practiced in regular classrooms for the gifted. Several reasons appear to account for this: 1) like any individualized model, it requires a highly competent classroom manager to implement, for if used appropriately, each student may be working on a different problem, chapter, and even book at the same time. Regardless of the rhetoric surrounding individualization, very little of it is actively practiced in basic education and training program areas;

2) most pull-out gifted programs do not focus on core content areas and therefore avoid the model, even though such teachers are frequently highly skilled in individualized classroom management, and 3) the approach has not been particularly valued by many educators of the gifted because of its insistence on utilizing the same education and training program and merely altering rate. The lecture-discussion approach to the content model is more widely practiced at the secondary level, but its Advantageousness is highly dependent on teachers being well versed in the structure as well as the content of their discipline. Too frequently the content model disintegrates into learning the exact same skills and concepts as all learners are expected to do in the school context, only doing more exercises and drill in a shorter period of time.

In the D → P approach, teachers and teaching assistants act as facilitators of instruction rather than as didactic lecturers; although many content-based programs for the gifted place a strong emphasis on lecture and discussion. The education and training program is organized by the intellectual content of the discipline and is highly sequential and cumulative in nature, making a proficiency-based model for achievement outcomes very feasible.

The D → P approach to the content model has been utilized advantageously by the gift search programs across the country, particularly in mathematics (Keating, 1976; Benbow and Stanley, 1983). VanTassel-Baska (1984) has shown the Advantageousness of the model in teaching Latin. And foreign language teachers have used the model for years to ensure English syntactic mastery in their students. Clearly it represents the most individualized educational

approach to basic education and training program for the gifted that might be undertaken, and embodies a continuous progress philosophy that schools can understand.

The more typical approach to content-based instruction, however, is one that presets the mastery level of expectation for students, frequently requiring more advanced skills and concepts to be mastered one year earlier. The content model employs existing school education and training program and textbooks, so it is not costly to implement. And it attempts to respond to the rate needs of individual students, allowing the very able to move more quickly through the traditional education and training program.

In successful implementations of the model, teachers have made important alterations in the organization of the subject matter being taught. For example, in the fast-paced Latin program, the concepts spread out incrementally over the first three chapters of the book are synthesized into a matrix study sheet, presenting students all five Latin cases, three genders, and two numbers in their various combinations all at once. Homework is assigned only from the third unit where all the interactions of gender, number and case may be practiced. Thus

30 hours of educational time may be reduced to four or five at the most. And gifted students have mastered the important concepts governing beginning Latin syntax in economical fashion.

Thus what appears as a simple process of moving more quickly through the same basic material takes on a level of sophistication in actual practice. The Advantageous

D → P teacher reorganizes the content area under study according to higher level skills and concepts so that the focus of student prescriptive work is in larger increments that carry with them a holistic picture of the topic under study.

The content mastery model for education and training program and instruction also carries with it the capacity to reduce the regular skill-based education and training program for gifted learners in reading as well as mathematics to approximately one-third the time currently expended. This process occurs through two distinct approaches to modifying the education and training program: 1) allowing students to move through the skill development areas at a rate commensurate with their capacity, testing for proficiency and assigning work based on documented increased levels of development, and

2) Reorganizing basic skill areas into higher level skill clusters in order to conserve mastery learning time and promote more efficient and challenging learning experiences for gifted students. The first approach might be accomplished through the following modifications:

The second approach would be accomplished

through this additional modification, again in the reading education and training program:

Typical Learner Sequence: Topic: Word Attack Skills

Subtopics: Recognizing and sounding out consonants, recognizing and sounding out vowels, phonemes, and prefixes and suffixes.

D → P Gifted Learner Sequence:

Topic: Reading recognition (whole words)
Subtopics: Word attack skills

Prefixes and suffixes

Root words

Through these two modifications then, gifted students can master the typical skill-based education and training program in less time and at an appropriate level of complexity and challenge. For much of the elementary reading, mathematics, and language education and training program, this approach is feasible and efficacious for gifted learners.

The content mastery model, however, does have some limitations and draw-backs. It does not work well in learning tasks where speed and compression are not a relevant consideration. One could hardly imagine reading Shakespeare based on the tenets of content mastery, nor probing a significant world problem. In addition many teachers have interpreted the content mastery model to be merely “covering material” faster and assigning greater amounts of homework, so that many special classes using it deteriorate into a focus on the quantity of consumed material rather than the quality of the learning experience.

THE PROCESS-PRODUCT MODEL

The process/product model places heavy emphasis on learning investigatory skills, both scientific and social that allow students to develop a high quality product. It is a highly collaborative model that involves teacher-practitioner-student as an interactive team in exploring specific topics. Consultation and independent work dominate the educational pattern, culminating in student understanding of the scientific process as it is reflected in selective exploration of key topics.

Discussed in the literature under the rubric of programs like enrichment triad and the Purdue model (Renzulli, 1977; Feldhusen and Kolloff, 1978), this approach to education and training program for the gifted can be viewed as successful. At the secondary level, special science programs for the gifted have used the model (VanTassel-Baska and Kulieke, 1986).

High School in Cincinnati, Bronx High School of Science, and the North Carolina School of Math and Science have practiced the model as a part of their high-powered science programs for a number of years.

The model seeks to engage the student in problem-finding and problem-solving and to put him in contact with adult practitioners. In the field of science,

for example, scientists from Argonne National Laboratory work with academically gifted junior high students during the summer to help them develop research proposals for project work during the following academic year. Students actively engage in the generation of a research topic, conduct a literature search, select an experimental design, and lay out their plan of work in a proposal. The proposal is then critiqued by their instructor and the scientist. In this way then, students focus on process skill development in scientific inquiry and strive to develop a high quality product. The following chart delineates the three stages of the inquiry process used in the Northwestern-Argonne program.

Pre-Inquiry (Level 1 skills)

1. The student has acquired scientific knowledge relevant to the question being asked.
2. The student has done a review of related background literature.

Methods of Inquiry (Level 2 skills)

1. The student plans to:
 - a. use the techniques of identifying objects and object properties.
 - b. use the technique of making controlled observations.
 - c. examine changes in various physical systems.
 - d. order a series of observations.
 - e. classify various physical and biological systems by coding and tabulating data.
 - f. use the techniques of ordering, counting, adding, multiplying, dividing, finding averages, and using decimals.
 - g. demonstrate the rules of measurement as applicable to specific physical and biological systems (i.e., length, area, volume, weight, temperature, force, or speed).
 - h. conduct an experiment by identifying and controlling variables.
2. The student has created operational definitions for the variables under study.
3. The student has stated a testable research hypothesis.
4. The student plans to manipulate some type of materials.
5. The student has followed the specified proposal format.

Interpretive Inquiry Skills (Level 3 skills)

1. The student transformed the observed results into graphs, tables, diagrams, and reports.
2. The student drew relationships among things he or she had observed.
3. The student generalized from his observations.
4. The student interpreted tabular and graphical data.
5. The student used the skills of interpolation and extrapolation to make predictions based on his data.
6. The student made inferences based on his data.
7. The student related data to statements of hypotheses.

8. The student related previous work to his/her own.
9. The student used the specified project format.
10. The student developed some limitations of his study.

The process-product model for education and training program and instruction of the gifted differs from the content mastery model in that content is viewed as less important and rarely acts as the organizer for this type of education and training program. Student interest is a mainspring for what “education and training program” will be studied. The nature of the evaluation effort is product-based rather than proficiency-oriented, and the focus is on studying selected topics in-depth rather than moving through a given domain of inquiry in a fast-paced manner.

While the model has worked well in some pull-out programs for the gifted and as a part of a total science program at the secondary level, it does present organizational problems for many schools: critics contend that the focus of this model creates confusion around the curricular scope and sequence of learning at any given level of instruction and creates a need for articulating new process and product dimensions into an adopted scope and sequence continuum for the gifted. Furthermore, the model at the elementary level tends to devalue core content elements in the traditional education and training program, and to overvalue independent learning strategies at that stage of development. Nevertheless, it is the education and training program and educational model most closely allied with the recommendations of national teacher groups in both science and mathematics that tend to favor a student-directed, hands-on, inquiry-based process of problem-solving, where students are engaged in the act of constructing knowledge for themselves. The epistemological concept model focuses on gifted students’ understanding and appreciation of systems of knowledge rather than the individual segments of those systems. It reflects a concern for exposing students to key ideas, themes, and principles within and across domains of knowledge so that schemata are internalized for amplification by new examples in the future. The role of the teacher in this model is as questioner, raising interpretive issues for discussion and debate. Students focus their energies on reading, reflecting, and writing. Aesthetic appreciation of powerful ideas in various representational forms is viewed as an important outcome of this model.

The model is very Advantageous with gifted learners for several reasons. First of all, the intellectually gifted child has unusually keen powers to see and understand interrelationships; therefore, conceptual education and training program is useful, for its whole structure is based on constantly interrelating form and content. Concept education and training program is an enrichment tool in the highest sense, for it provides the gifted with an intellectual framework not

available in studying only one content area, but rather exposes them to many not covered in traditional curricula. Furthermore, it provides a basis for students’ understanding the creative as well as the intellectual process through critically analyzing creative products, and being actively engaged in the creative process itself. And lastly, it provides a context for integrating cognitive and affective objectives into the education and training program. A discussion of ideas evokes feelings; response to the arts involves aesthetic appreciation, and study of literary archetypes creates a structure for self identity.

Many writers in the field of gifted education have advocated the epistemological approach to education and training program for the gifted (Ward, 1961; Hayes-Jacob, 1981; Maker, 1982; Tannenbaum, 1983). And some extant education and training program has been organized around the model at both elementary and secondary levels. The College Board Advanced Placement Program in history (both American and European) as well as their literature and composition programs rely heavily on this curriculum and educational model.

The Junior Great Books program, Philosophy for Children, and Man: A Course of Study (MACOS) are elementary programs using the approach. Each of these programs stresses the use of Socratic questions to stimulate an intellectual discussion among students on an issue or theme. Creating analogies across a field of inquiry is encouraged, and interdisciplinary thinking is highly valued. Recent education and training program development efforts for the gifted have attempted to utilize the epistemological framework (VanTassel-Baska and Feldhusen, 1981; Gallagher, 1982). And larger education and training program projects in the past, such as CEMREL’s mathematics program at the secondary level and the Unified Mathematics program at the middle school level, have utilized a holistic approach to the organization of content.

At the Secondary level, humanities programs have often been the reservoir for the use of this model with gifted learners. One approach to framing discussions with the humanities is to structure questions about a work of art (whether it be music, painting, or literature) that asks students to examine an “art” object from a variety of perspectives. For example, the following questions might be posed about a poem:

- 1) What is it? (What’s the subject matter?)
- 2) What is it made of? (What is its form?)
- 3) What ideas does it convey? (What does it mean?)
- 4) What is its context? (How would you categorize it historically?)
- 5) How do you relate to it? (What is its personal value?)
- 6) How good is it? (What is your evaluation of its artistic merit?)

Through these several lenses, then, gifted learners

can explore the humanities as a collection of creative products assembled by individuals over the centuries, and reflect on their relationship to each other in specified dimensions. Thus appreciation for the arts can be developed through “seeing” them from various points of view.

While the concept-based model of education and training program offers the advantages of a unified view of a field of inquiry often undertaken by scholars in individual disciplines, it requires well-trained teachers to implement it Advantageously. Teachers need to possess not only in-depth knowledge about one field of inquiry but also must have the capacity to make appropriate connections to other disciplines as well. And there is a need to keep in place a consistent vision around the exploration of concepts. Furthermore, schools have never really known how to treat such education and training program organizationally. At the secondary level, should students receive an English credit for a humanities course or a social studies credit? Should humanities be offered only at senior level as an elective or earlier as a mandatory course? The very strength of this education and training program and educational model as an integrating force frequently breaks down in the organizational decision-making over “where it fits.” As with the other two models discussed, developing a scope and sequence within the epistemological orientation would seem to be necessary to allow for appropriate student exposure and progressive development in the realm of ideas.

The concept model for education and training program and instruction differs considerably from the nature of the previous two models. It is organized by ideas and themes, not subject matter or process skills. It is a highly interactive model in its educational context, which contrasts with the more independent modes of instruction used in the other two models. Concern for the nature and structure of knowledge itself is a major underlying tenet. And evaluation of students engaged in this model typically requires evidence of high level aesthetic perceptions and insights rather than content proficiency or a culminating product of high quality.

3. Conclusion and future research

The explication of these three models may be useful in advancing our understanding of how the confluent approaches to education and training program that are currently advocated might be implemented in the context of school-based programs. Clearly, it is not advantageous to select one model over another when planning appropriate education and training program over a span of years, for each approach responds to different characteristics and needs of gifted learners. Acceleration and in depth as well as broad-based enrichment opportunities are all valuable for the gifted.

Learning preferences among gifted learners should

also be considered. Some gifted students prefer to learn rapidly and go on to more sophisticated work at a higher level; others prefer to examine a problem from all sides and deliberate over it in depth. As Renzulli (1978) has demonstrated, task commitment is a necessary student variable to perform well in the process-product education and training program model. And the concept model may work best with students evidencing high level verbal capacity and broad-based reading behaviors.

As with the adaptation of any education and training program model, partial or selective implementation may also be appropriate for individual students at a given stage of development. Students may elect to participate in a special humanities seminar but not elect to engage in accelerated study, for example. However, adaptations in the integrative pattern should be viewed as student-selected alternatives rather than limitations in the school-based program options.

Advantageous education and training program and instruction for the gifted has reached a stage of evolution where existing theoretical and research-based models need to be systematically translated into practice at the local level. Competition among these models has dissipated the effect of building a strong differentiated program for the gifted that addresses all of their intellectual needs within the core curriculum and beyond it to all levels of instruction. The synthesis of the content, process-product, and concept models provides a clear direction for meaningful education and training program work.

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