Katrina Wagner

Strategies and Instructional Models

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Writing Assignment #1

Our society today values exceptional ability in many different arenas: sports, music, and art. However, in academics, our educational system focuses on bringing all students up to the minimum requirements; and in regards to funding and training, largely ignores students who have exceptional abilities academically. In order for educators to appropriately identify and challenge gifted learners, its vital for them to understand what makes these students different and some common characteristics that gifted children exhibit. Winebrenner writes, “More often than not, an understanding of the academic, social, and emotional needs of gifted students…can noticeably diminish negative behaviors and enhance their more positive behaviors” (14). Knowledge of the nature and needs of gifted learners is the first, and most important, step in being able to respond appropriately to gifted students in the classroom.

Specifically, parents and teachers should be informed about some of the most common characteristics of gifted children that must be addressed in order for these students to achieve success. Perfectionism can cause gifted children to create products at a high level of quality, but it can also lead to emotional anxiety and procrastination when students decide that if they can’t do something perfectly, then why do it at all. “Parents and teachers unwittingly contribute to the need of these students to be perfect at all times…these children notice how the adults in their life make a pleasant fuss when they exhibit precocious behaviors…[or] when they call attention to a student’s exceptional work, holding it up as a model for the other students without knowing whether any true effort was involved” (17). Parents and teachers must be aware of how their words and actions can affect the development of gifted students, and should work to communicate to students the importance of effort.

Parents and educators also need to be aware of students who are gifted creatively. These gifted students can often be misunderstood because “their behavior tends to annoy teachers, and their apparent ‘fooling around’ often results in incomplete work” (20). These students need opportunities to participate in the creative thinking process and should be encouraged to find outlets for their creative products. Without an understanding of the needs of creatively gifted children, adults can unknowingly frustrate these students can block their creativity.

The most complex type of gifted students are those that are twice-exceptional. It can be difficult to identify the giftedness in these students because they might exhibit a high ability in some areas and a low ability in others. “These kids have some noticeable academic learning strengths but may never be recognized as gifted. Their learning challenge may mask their strengths. Since most schools usually stop looking for exceptional educational abilities once a learning deficiency has been identified, their giftedness will probably go unidentified” (23). Parents, possibly even more than teachers, who are blessed with twice-exceptional children must work to understand the strengths and challenges of their child so they can fight for the correct identification in schools.

I’ve been waiting for the “strategies” course for the entire endorsement process. Although it’s crucial that I have the background information regarding laws surrounding the gifted and the nature and needs of gifted learners; I’m excited to learn new practical strategies to effectively educate the gifted students in my classroom and provide challenges for them that can meet their needs. So often I get frustrated when I know that a student needs more, but I feel unable to differentiate appropriately because I just don’t have the knowledge. I’m hoping that this class will not only provide strategies for gifted students that I can use in my advanced humanities classes, but also strategies that I can share with my colleagues to help them differentiate in their own classrooms. I want to be able to provide learning opportunities for gifted students that they will appreciate and that will provide sufficient challenges for them in their area of giftedness.