



Module 6: Two Approaches to Gifted Education

Introduction

Welcome to module 6 in this short course in gifted education. In this video I am going to discuss two broad approaches to gifted education provision. These are acceleration and enrichment.

Acceleration

Recent research by the Centre for Talented Youth suggested that Irish teachers were opposed to acceleration. This is despite evidence from researchers in giftedness showing that acceleration is an effective means of addressing the academic needs of gifted children.

Southern and Jones (2004) writing in 'A Nation Deceived' listed 18 different types of acceleration. These can be summarized as;

Grade skipping, where a child skips a class. For example, going from Junior Infants into First Class or skipping Year 2 at second level to go into Year 3.

Self-paced learning, where the pupils progress through the curriculum content at their own pace with the ability to work on material ahead of their peers.

Cluster groups, where a younger gifted student may join a class working on a subject at a more advanced level.

Curriculum Compacting, where a student moves through the curriculum faster with less introductory material and less repetitive practice.

Extra-curricular programs, where a child enrolls in an advanced course. The Centre for Talented Youth offers some courses such as this.

The essence of acceleration is that it is a system of allowing a student who is capable, to move faster through the curriculum content and allowing them to access more advanced material earlier than their peers.

Acceleration has some important benefits for the gifted student. It enables them to learn with like-minded students even if they are of different ages. Acceleration provides a greater academic challenge for gifted students and ensures to some extent that a gifted student has an opportunity to learn something new every day.

There are however, some negatives to acceleration. There is a concern that gifted children who are accelerated by grade skipping suffer from social separation

from their age peers. Southern and Jones (2004) highlights the absence of evidence for this. However, acceleration need not result in a gifted child never having social interaction with their age peers. Gifted that some children are gifted in one or two domains only, so they can enjoy acceleration in those domains and return to their age peers for other domains.

The key to effective acceleration is effective planning. An individual teacher would not decide in isolation from their colleagues to implement, for example, curriculum compacting for a pupil. I recently spoke with one parent whose primary pupil in third class was given a fourth class mathematics exercise book to complete because the child had completed the third class book and still had 7 months of school to complete. This seems fine until one considers what the child will do when they enter 4th class; and then what will happen the year after that.

So accelerations should be a whole school response.

Despite the responses to the CTYI research on acceleration, there is a form of acceleration practiced in Irish second level schools.

Currently the Junior and Senior Cycle programmes in Irish schools offer higher level curricula and examinations. Students who are capable can pursue higher level curricula in all subjects. While this is not grade skipping or curriculum compacting, the higher and ordinary level distinction does point towards students being able to access more advanced curriculum content in Irish Schools.

Enrichment

Enrichment is an approach to teaching and learning in which a gifted student (or any other capable student) is allowed to study a topic in more breadth and depth than the rest of the cohort. Enrichment can occur in an acceleration setting but more generally it is used in classrooms with a wider range of abilities.

In classroom where the teacher facilitates enrichment, the gifted student works on the same curriculum components as his or her peers but because they work faster, they will have time to delve deeper into a topic.

Example of enrichment

Below is an example from the syllabus requirements for Junior Cycle history published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in Ireland. I have added the last column with suggestions for some enrichment activities. Most students would study this section of the course as mediated by the textbook and their teacher's individual approach to the class.

Topic	Section II – Studies of Change Description	Approach	Enrichment Activities
Political Change: Revolutionary movements	General Study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background; sources of discontent in pre-revolutionary America, France and Ireland. Revolutionary movements in America, France and Ireland, late 18 th and early 19 th centuries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consequences of these revolutions. Special Study: Life of one revolutionary	Exploring different kinds of change through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - understanding of cause and consequence - use of appropriate documentary sources - special studies 	Student could; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - investigate what events were occurring in other parts of the world at this time; - examine the connections between different revolutionaries - read deeper into the underlying philosophy of the revolutions

Enrichment activities can also include learning opportunities that are not part of the regular school curriculum. The Centre for Talented Youth provides a number of courses which are essentially enrichment courses. At various times, these included International Relations, Legal Studies, Archaeology, and Education all of which are subjects not included in the school curriculum.

Need for Planning and Accountability

As with all formal learning events, enrichment activities need to be planned and be outcomes-based. A student who is facilitated with enrichment activities should be able to demonstrate their learning. This can be done through a learning log, various assignment forms or reports which they must complete or by presentation to the class so as to share their learning.

In the next video we will look more closely at approaches to differentiation in the classroom

References

NCCA Junior Cycle History Syllabus

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