



Module 8: Classroom Strategies

Introduction

Welcome to Module 8 in this short introduction to gifted education. In this video I'm going to discuss what gifted children say about school as this may inform your practice. After that I outline some approaches and strategies for meeting the needs of gifted children in school.

What do gifted children say about school?

The biggest complaints that gifted children have about school is that there is

- Too much repetition
- Too slow
- Not enough material.
- Not enough time for questions
- Being 'rewarded' with extra work
- Opinion not valued
- Limited resources
- Don't like mixed ability

As mixed ability is now the norm in the majority of Irish schools and it is recommended by the NCCA, there is little schools can do about this without some creative and courageous leadership and a little bit of political will.

Some of all the complaints noted above are worth highlighting.

Particularly in primary school, when a pupil finishes class work ahead of other pupils, a common teacher response is to give the pupil extra work to do. To the student, this looks like they're being rewarded with extra work just for working faster. This will cause pupils to dumb down their efforts.

The issue here is not so much extra work as the type of extra work. Giving students something different to do is preferable to 'more of the same'.

The second complaint worth noting is that gifted students feel their opinion is not a valued. This is not a complaint about the lack of time teachers have to deal with every individual contributions in a busy and overcrowded classroom. Rather it is to do with to do with the respect a teacher forwards to the gifted student and indeed any student who contributes to class. While it is important the teacher keeps the class on-task and and while digression can be negative,

there are times when some digression can grease the wheels of classroom motivation.

Minimum intervention

4 key approaches that will make a major difference for students are

- Recognition and acceptance
- Use learning Centres
- Design independent learning project work.
- Create social learning opportunities

Recognition and Acceptance

Arguably the most important quality you can demonstrate in class is recognition and acceptance of the gifted child. As I mentioned earlier a child may not know that they fit into the description called 'gifted', and in many cases it's best that they don't know this. Nonetheless the power positive regard in the classroom is a powerful tool the teacher can use to affirm to self-worth of an individual student.

This applies to all students, not just the gifted. While the effort a student makes is important, the recognition that a student is capable acts as a powerful motivator for a gifted child who naturally tends to be excessively self-critical.

The idea of the 'teacher's pet' or is a student to is a 'swot' remains all too common in classrooms today. By creating a culture of learning in the classroom where each child's attempts at learning is defended, supported and encouraged, the teacher can create an environment where it is safe for children with high levels of intellectual curiosity to express their ideas and opinions.

Learning Centres

The use of learning centres can provide a ready-made solution to the challenges posed by a child who finishes their work ahead of other children. A learning centre is a dedicated corner of the classroom fitted out with a table, chairs and a bookshelf. Materials such as newspapers, magazines, art materials, books and even a PC are provided in the learning centre. If a student has finished their class work for a lesson, or at some other appropriate time, the teacher can allow the student to go to the learning centre. There they can work on a topic of interest to them or delve deeper into the topic of the classwork they have just been working on.

Whichever the teacher allows, the student should be required to report back on their learning.

Independent Learning

Learning centres work best when the teacher has pre-designed independent learning project work with the gifted student. This independent project work can be related either to the current lessons taking place in the classroom or can be about a completely different topic that the gifted student has chosen themselves.

For independent project work, the teacher can assign milestones or targets and provide instruction on research skills to the student which they can utilize while working on their project.

Learning centres work great at primary level where there is more flexibility in the use of classroom time compared secondary school where classes change relatively quickly. Despite this, learning centres can work at second level. Even if a learning centre is not feasible in your classroom, there are always opportunities for independent project work.

Create social learning opportunities

Gifted students often have interests which are different from the norm. While most students are content to do school work, gifted students will intrinsically enjoy learning new things and not see it as school work per se. This alone marks them out as different. The lack of shared interests means that there are fewer social opportunities for some gifted students.

Teachers can compensate for this in a classroom by creating social learning opportunities. Pair or group work, role-play and presentations create opportunities for gifted students to interact with other students in their class.

Jigsaw Classroom

Another very effective approach to differentiation in a mixed ability classroom environment is called a jigsaw classroom.

In this approach each student has one piece of the jigsaw that comprises the whole.

Each student must learn and then teach their material to the other students.

Only by listening to each other and contributing to the whole can all the students understand the whole lesson content.

In this activity each student's contribution is valued and is valuable. Any concerns about individual group members not participating fully can be addressed by using an Assessment for Learning technique whereby the grade of the lowest achieving member of the group is assigned to the whole group.

The Jigsaw Classroom can provide valuable social learning opportunities for gifted students. It encourages teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, responsibility and independent learning. It can also provide important opportunities to rise to a learning challenge in school.

The Jigsaw Classroom can be arranged where groups share components of the jigsaw or where the class as a whole shares components. This approach works very well in role-play lessons and lessons where new concepts and a range of factors are being taught.

I have used this in geography teaching where students have to learn about conflict between industry and the environment. I present a scenario to the class whereby a local factory owner wants to build a new factory. The class is divided into teams representing the company, local politicians, environmentalists, local residents, local unemployed and local businesses. They each have to decide what their position would be. When all of the information comes together student can have a full, rounded idea of the arguments for and against the construction of a factory in their local area.

Upwardly mobile

One example of a very manageable approach to differentiation is called upwardly mobile. This approach is a student-centred activity that can form part of problem-based learning (new material is being learned) or as the student activity component of a lesson where students are reinforcing material presented in the instructional phase.

A teacher may design an exercise which has three levels of difficulty **Must** **Should** and **Could**. All students are expected to complete 'must' activity to achieve the minimum level of attainment acceptable. If students finish this work before others, they move on to do work which most student **should** be able to complete. Only a few students **could** get to the third exercise. The third exercise provides a higher level challenge suitable for the more able students.

I have tried this very successfully in class with Junior Cycle students, particularly in reviewing **vocabulary** and **concepts** in Geography.

When presenting Upwardly Mobile activities in class, the teacher should outline activities from the top down and encourage all students to aim high. Rather than dividing the exercises up between students, all three levels should be made available to all students. This avoids the risk of weaker students being offended that they weren't given a harder material. It also means that stronger students can demonstrate that they have covered the basics. In my experience once all the activities are available to all students a positive atmosphere results.

One of the great benefits of upwardly mobile is that there is sufficient activity for students to be engaged throughout the class. Additionally, students get to decide how far they can go. You do have to keep an eye on students who

may decide not make much of an effort. However I have found that careful classroom seating arrangements insures students pull each other along.

Differentiating Product

When I started teaching the use of written summaries for homework was quite common practice and I suspect it still is. However in recent years I have changed my practice and rarely give summaries for homework any more.

Instead, I regularly ask my students to decide how they will present their homework. I provide them with a list of options from which they can choose. So while all students will have the same homework to do, they can choose how they present the homework. This really gets students creative juices flowing and it makes homework much more bearable.

Students can produce presentations, a poem, a story, a newspaper report, a dialogue, poster, the comic strip, a video, a flowchart, a song with or without music, model, pop up book to name a few.

List of different products students can use.

Advertisements	Songs & Poems	Editorial	Flip book	Model
Collage	Travelogue	Essay	Game	Pamphlet
Chart	Iron-on transfers	Experiment	Illustrated story	Project cube
Comic strip	Write an App!	Fact file	Mobile,	Poster
Debate	Cut-away model	Fairy tale	Mural	Science fiction story
Diorama	Facebook Page	Family tree	Museum exhibit	Sculpture
Crossword puzzle	Survey	A Design challenge	A consumer product	A Business plan
Perform a weather forecast	Video of a TV news report	A This-Is-Your-Life Album	A website	A Play
Plasticine model	Time line	Stop motion animation	A Dance	A QR Code Trail

Occasionally I will specify one of these, for example, a news story. This gives me an opportunity to discuss with students the components of a good front-page news story. I will set the criteria for success. In this case, the criteria were whether or not I would buy the newspaper on the strength of the front-page story!

Overall, students are given a task, the minimum requirement and the success criteria.

Use of Technology

As a big user of technology I'm cautious about it's use in class. My position is that it is just one more tool. To be sure, it is an extremely important tool but given the absence of evidence for increased attainment, I find it hard to justify placing all my pedagogical eggs in it.

That said, Google Search Education is a useful tool particularly for gifted students who can consume knowledge rapidly. There is a link below the video to Google's search education page. This will help teachers improve their search skills as well as give them the tools to teach it to students.

Research Skills

Teaching research skills to gifted students is an excellent way to engage them in independent learning and equip them with a useful skill for the future. Finding information is very with the Internet. But so too is it easy to find lots of wrong information. Teaching research skills will help student learn to source and evaluate information.

Teaching the skills of designing questionnaires, conducting surveys, analyzing and interpreting data to arrive at conclusions will engage gifted students. Getting them to present their findings in also invaluable for their interaction with other people.

Tic-Tac-Toe

Tic-Tac-Toe is an organizer for giving student a choice of activities. Bloom's taxonomy can be used to assign activities to each square of the Tic-Tac-Toe. The chart shows some examples I've drawn these from different subjects and different topics. However, for your subject you could draw up a chart like this for one topic or a collection of related topics.

Typically Tic-Tac-Toe has just three rows and three columns. Students choose ONE activity from each from the horizontal rows.

Tic-Tac-Toe builds choice and flexibility into classroom activities and helps motivate students through the autonomy it gives them.

Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyse	Evaluate	Create
List the Presidents of Ireland	Describe the life cycle of a butterfly	Write a letter explaining breach of contract	What is the relationship between carbon and the greenhouse effect?	Argue why people should pay water charges.	Draw a flowchart to show the independence movement in Ireland/ France/ USA
Identify the parts of a flower	Categories different types of enterprises	Role-play a consumer complaint	Analyse the stages in the development of a waterfall	Predict what will happen when we toss a coin.	Propose an idea for Young Scientists competition
Draw a to show Venn Diagram terms	Summarise the casues of World War 1	If inflation is 3% what will this basket of good cost in a year?	What is Boyle's Law?	How accurate are the arguments in this debate?	Examine these maths problems. What is the rule?

Summary

There are a variety of approaches to help gifted students in your classroom. The role of positive regard cannot be over-stated. Social learning opportunities are important but so too is independent project or problem-based work. Upwardly mobile will build simple flexibility into your teaching and learning and it engages all students. The use of Bloom's taxonomy will help you generate creative ideas for lessons as well as find more a challenging range of activities for students.

References

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