Grouping: Many negative myths, mostly positive facts

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Introduction

Grouping...fulltimely!

The reality: Regular Classroom Enrichment (RCE)
  - How often do teachers use it?
  - Why it doesn't work

The alternative: Full time grouping
  - Answering common objections

Basic terminology

Basic assumptions

INTRODUCTION

Basic terminology

Basic assumptions
The «classic» trinity

- Enrichment / Grouping / Acceleration
- **THREE** major drawbacks:
  - They are wrongly presented as mutually exclusive.
  - They seem to compare ‘oranges’ & ‘bananas’.
  - They wrongly oppose Enrichment and Acceleration (either/or).

An alternative view

- REGULAR CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT
  A sobering reality
A touchy subject!

Bla bla
(to be completed)

Essential message

**Ideally**, regular classroom teachers should provide appropriate enrichment to their academically talented students.

**In practice**, it is not done.

**Why?** Because it is an impossible challenge.

The only appropriate alternative:

full-time grouping.

The rationale for RCE

- Large individual differences exist in learning ability (potential).
- Curriculum differentiation addresses these differences.
- Enrichment represents the specific form of differentiation for fast learners.
- Enrichment should be an integral part of the regular curriculum for academically talented students.
- Because students spend the vast majority of their time in regular classrooms, proper enrichment should be provided right there, in their regular classroom.
The 1993 NRCGT study

Main study goal
Do classroom teachers modify instructional practices and curricular materials to meet the needs of academically talented students?

Basic Methodology
Mailed National Survey

Methodology: Sample
Grades 3 & 4 teachers
- 4000 public school teachers
- 1000 private school teachers
- 600 teachers (African-Amer. schools)
- 600 teachers (Hispanic-Amer. schools)
- 600 teachers (Asian-Amer. schools)
- 600 teachers (Amer.-Indian schools)
- Total: 7400 teachers (3456 responses)

Methodology: Instrument (1)
Classroom practices questionnaire (CPQ)
- 39 items; 6 sections/scales
- Examples of items:
  - Ask questions to encourage reasoning [35/I]
  - Group by ability across classrooms [29/II]
  - Offer contracts for independent study [25/II]
  - Assign advanced level reading [23/III]
  - Offer creative writing (student's topic) [20/III]
  - Use pretests to determine mastery [18/IV]
  - Eliminate material that students master [16/IV]
  - Use enrichment centers [15/V]
  - Use enrichment worksheets [13/VII]
Methodology: Instrument (2)

Classroom practices questionnaire (CPQ)
- Frequency scale
  - 0 = Never
  - 1 = Once a month, or less frequently
  - 2 = A few times a month
  - 3 = A few times a week
  - 4 = Daily
  - 5 = More than once a day
- Answer separately for talented & average students.

Summary of results
- Very infrequent 'enrichment': at best, once weekly on average.
- Little differentiation between high and average achievers: most 'enrichment’ provisions target the whole group.
- No geographical differences.
- No differences between sub-samples.
- Having a 'gifted program’ changed nothing.

Authors’ conclusion
- “The results of this survey paint a disturbing picture of the types of instructional services gifted students receive in regular classrooms across the United States.
- It is clear from the results that teachers in regular third and fourth grade classrooms make only minor modifications in the curriculum and their instruction to meet the needs of gifted students.”
  (Archambault et al., 1993, p. 5)
Parallel study (Westberg et al.)

- **Method:**
  - Sample: 46 classes (national coverage).
  - Observation instrument adapted from CPQ.
  - Two 1-day visits.
  - Two target students: one gifted, one average.

- **Results:**
  - Homogeneous grouping only 21% of the time.
  - Advanced content 5% of the time on average (11% in math).
  - No differentiation 84% of the time on average.

Authors’ conclusion

“The results of the observational study indicate that little differentiation in the instructional and curricular practices, including grouping arrangements and verbal interactions is provided to gifted and talented students in the regular classroom.”

(Westberg et al., 1993, p. XI)

Replications

- **Whitton, 1997**
  - 600 grade 3 & 4 teachers, NSW, Australia.
  - Same instrument, almost identical results.

- **Robinson, 1998**
  - 1000 7th grade teachers, USA.
  - No meaningful differences in curriculum between high and average achievers.

- **Westberg & Daoust, 2003**
  - 550 grade 3 & 4 teachers, USA, 2 states.
  - Same instrument, almost identical results.
Why the lack of RCE?

• Priority to at-risk students (NCLB)
• Impact of mainstreaming policy
  ◦ ‘Dumbing down’ of the curriculum
• Increased workload
• Limited training (pre/in-service)
  ◦ ~60% of public school teachers have no training whatsoever in G/T
  ◦ ~1% reported having a degree in G/T
• Ambivalent attitudes toward talent

Teachers’ beliefs

Fordham Institute Survey (2008)
(National sample of 6000 K-12 teachers; 900 respondents)

In your judgment, how easy or difficult a mission is it to implement differentiated instruction on a daily basis in the classroom?

1 - Very difficult
2 - Somewhat difficult
3 - Somewhat easy
4 - Very easy

Grouping...fulltimely!

35% = very difficult
48% = somewhat difficult
12% = somewhat easy
4% = very easy
Training available in the USA

“State of the States in G/T education” (2011)

- Only six states require pre-service training for regular classroom teachers on characteristics and needs of gifted students.
- In thirty-six states, regular classroom teachers are never required to receive training about the gifted learners who are inevitably in their classrooms.
- More than half of the states do not expect teachers whose sole focus is the gifted learner to even know something about those students.

(Fisher, 2011)

The costs of proper training(1)

VanTassel-Baska et al. (2008) study

- Goal:
  - Assess the efficacy of a training program in the use of enrichment materials in the regular classroom.
- Sample: 71 teachers (half experimental, half control)
- Training:
  - 3-day summer institute + 1-day mid-semester meeting each year for three years.
- Assessment:
  - One visit each year by 2 trained observers using the Classroom Observation Scale-Revised (COS-R).

Results:
- Significant improvement observed only in second year, with no further change in third year.
- NOTE: 65% dropout rate (even in control group!).

Authors’s conclusions:
- “These data suggest the need for multiple years of professional development,” [and also] “the need for monitoring classroom implementation since teachers tend to rate themselves higher than outside observers” (p. 307).

My conclusion:
- That well-executed study illustrates quite well my belief that the availability of proper enrichment in the regular classroom represents a “mission impossible” for 2 million teachers!
The costs of proper training\(^{(3)}\)

Joyce VanTassel-Baska’s comment

“I am very pleased with how you have captured the essence of it and quite agree that this kind of effort is doomed to be done only under a funded grant situation. Go for it!

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE!

THE ALTERNATIVE: FULL-TIME GROUPING
Why “fulltimely”? 

Critique of the "pull-out" model
- A part-time response to a full-time need
- A content mostly unrelated to the academic curriculum
- A costly enterprise
- A false sense of "problem solved"
- A potentially valuable complement, but...
  ...a poor substitute to fulltimely!

Common objections: academic impact

- They don’t achieve better as a group.
- The risks of failure are increased.
- Imperfect identification of talent.
- The group loses stimulating leaders.

What the research says

On academic impacts
- Research survey
  - Dozens of studies conducted.
  - Several meta-analyses performed.
  - Focus on paired-ability studies.
- Main conclusions
  - No difference in many cases.
  - Positive difference in a few cases.
- An essential condition: enrichment.
Common objections: social impacts

- Unhealthy competition.
- Lowered self-concept (of non-chosen)
- Social homogenization.
- Conceitedness
- Labeling from the out-group.
- Creaming: a loss for teachers.

What the research says.

On social impacts

- Very few studies, but... lots of opinions!
- Little impact one way or the other.
- Much social diversity within high ability groups; a lot depends on the school's geographical location.
- A major testimonial plus: intellectual stimulation from peers with similar interests.
- Little negative impact in regular classroom.

B.C. By Johnny Hart

SORRY TO HEAR YOU WERE REJECTED BY THE GRAPEFRUIT LEAGUE THIS YEAR.

HEH, NO PROB.
Why do most educators outside of gifted education—and many within—always give priority to social adaptation over educational adaptation?

Because regular classroom teachers do not provide broad-based and sustained enrichment, it is only through full-time grouping, at all grade levels of the K-12 educational system, that we will properly answer the educational needs of academically talented students.
The damage would be greatest, however, if schools, in the name of de-tracking, eliminated enriched and accelerated classes for their brightest learners.

The achievement level of such students falls dramatically when they are required to do routine work at a routine pace.

No one can be certain that there would be a way to repair the harm that would be done if schools eliminated all programs of acceleration and enrichment.

(Kulik, 1992, p. XVI)