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Before You Start: Why, When and How

Why?

Why are you planning this inservice? If your answer is "Because teachers in my building want to know more about adapting the regular curriculum to meet the needs of bright students," you have a two mile head start. If your answer is, "My teachers aren't doing a very good job teaching above-average students and I want to improve them," something needs changing, and not just your teachers! Teachers, like any adults (and a lot of children, for that matter), resist learning things for which they see no possible use, and openly resent any implication that they are incompetent or ineffective. Who wouldn't? This brings us to two vital points. First, if at all possible, involve teachers in planning the goals of your training sessions. This might be done through means of a needs assessment survey or a faculty planning committee. In a needs assessment, many teachers will probably indicate an interest in modifying the regular curriculum, since that is their area of responsibility and expertise. If so, you can say, "In response to your interest, we have planned a workshop..." Instant head-start! If your faculty members do not have any interest in adapting the regular curriculum, you might better spend your time working on areas in which they do have interest and building a supportive collegial relationship with the teachers (Reis, 1983) or prepare for a very rugged inservice!

This brings us to vital point number two: We are *all* in this together. No teacher or coordinator of gifted programs can possibly meet the needs of bright students alone. It is helpful to view the gifted program as a service to classroom teachers to help them manage the huge variety of demands made on them. Our job as staff developers is to offer tools and encouragement. It is absolutely essential that we avoid an "us" vs. "them" situation, or any implication that we are out to "fix" defective teaching. None of us can succeed alone, and only with an attitude of helpfulness and support can we succeed together.

When?

Avoid extra after school meetings like the plague! If we ask teachers to attack any new task when they are tired, hungry and full of stress, we have probably tripled its difficulty. Ideally, arrange to present training sessions during released time, when classes are dismissed or covered by

substitute teachers. Some districts have been very successful offering summer inservice for which teachers are paid. If you must hold meetings after school, it is best to try to use all or part of a regularly scheduled staff meeting rather than ask teachers to stay late an additional day. Sometimes training can be broken into short segments over several meetings to meet the needs of specific districts. If you have no choice but to have an after-school training session, make every possible effort to make it pleasant. Make sure the physical surroundings are comfortable, serve coffee and cookies, smile, do your best, and keep it short. If teachers feel positive about your efforts, there will always be another day.

How?

Make it your own! Please don't attempt to memorize the text of the first part of this package. I've written a sample which is right for me; take it and make it right for you. The overheads will serve as cues for major points which should be covered. Adapt them with stories from your own experience, examples from your own faculty, and applications in your area. You must thoroughly understand the material, believe it, and be able to use it in your own unique way. *Then* you are ready to start. Section I, An Introduction to Curriculum Compacting, provides essential background information on the procedures of compacting. Other valuable references are *A Guidebook for Developing Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) for Gifted and Talented Students* (Renzulli & Smith, 1979), *The Revolving Door Identification Model* (Renzulli, Reis & Smith, 1981), and *The Schoolwide Enrichment Model* (Renzulli & Reis, 1985).

Before beginning the training, arrange to have handout packets reproduced and collated. All teachers should receive worksheets one through four (WS1-WS4) and copies of any transparencies you feel are appropriate. It is usually easiest to distribute packets as the teachers arrive.

Finally, it is important that your audience be as physically comfortable as possible. Choose the most comfortable chairs available, serve refreshments if possible, and be sure to schedule a break in any workshop longer than one hour.

Section I

AN INTRODUCTION TO CURRICULUM COMPACTING

One of the greatest challenges facing advocates of education of the gifted is the effort to provide bright children with appropriate and challenging educational experiences throughout all the days and hours of the school year. Such a challenge must reach beyond the range of any enrichment program and address the procedures used for teaching the basic curriculum.

Despite the increasing proliferation of special programs for gifted and talented students, most bright students, even those involved in special programming, spend the vast majority of their time in regular classrooms. A very small percentage of that time is spent on activities designed to challenge the most advanced students. The Richardson study, a nationwide investigation of current practices in

gifted education, reported that in schools using classroom enrichment, 58% of those reporting said students were involved in enrichment activities less than three hours per week (Wilkie, 1985). In many cases, time in the classroom is spent in activities designed to teach and reinforce concepts that students have already mastered (Educational Information Products Exchange Institute, 1979). This repetitious work can lead not just to boredom, but to discipline problems, inattentiveness and failure to develop organized and rigorous study patterns. If such difficulties are to be avoided, it is essential that the needs of the bright student be addressed not only in special programming, but by examining the content and pacing of the regular classroom.

Curriculum Compacting

While teachers may recognize the necessity of providing challenging educational activities for bright students, the many pressing demands of the classroom make the management of such activities difficult. At the same time, concerns about accountability and the mastery of basic skills make teachers understandably hesitant to allow even the most able students to omit normally required material. One management technique that has been developed to implement curricular change for bright students while assuring mastery of basic skills is curriculum compacting (Renzulli, Smith & Reis, 1982). This section will describe successful techniques developed by classroom teachers implementing curriculum compacting at a variety of grade levels.

Individual Compacting

Compacting for an individual in many ways parallels the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) used in special education. The first step in compacting is identifying a student's strength areas. Information may be gathered from a variety of sources: classwork, school records, standardized tests, parent input, former teachers, observation, etc. Once general strength areas have been identified, a decision is made as to the area(s) most appropriate for compacting. The compacting process asks three basic questions: 1) What does the child already know? 2) What does s/he need to learn? 3) What differentiated activities will be offered to meet the child's needs? Information may be organized on a

three column form called a Compactor (see Figure 1, Renzulli & Smith, 1978).

The first column of the Compactor, *Curriculum Areas to be Considered for Compacting*, is used to describe the basic curriculum to be taught and to answer the question: What does the child already know? The teacher may employ formal or informal preassessment techniques to gather this information. Most basal texts include both pretest and posttest materials. These may be used as designed or altered to more accurately evaluate a teacher's goals. Some teachers prefer to use an end-of-unit test as a pretest to ensure a more thorough evaluation of needed skills. Others may choose to add teacher-made tests or evaluative conferences to pretest materials to assess knowledge of supplementary material. In cases where no pretest is commercially available, teachers may use evaluation procedures planned for the end of a unit of study as a preassessment.

In Figure 1, Michael's teacher, Ms. Kaster, has identified language arts as his strength area. In order to determine Michael's current knowledge of the language arts material she is about to teach, she has given a pretest. Michael has scored 100% on all items except those dealing with outlining.

Column II, *Procedures for Compacting*, is used to describe activities to be used to teach needed skills. Since Michael has already mastered most of the skills in Units 3 and 4, he will not do all the worksheets and workbook pages associated with the units. His teacher has used the