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CONCERNS ABOUT PROGRAMMING FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

During the last several years we have witnessed a resurgence of interest in programming for gifted and talented students at the secondary level. This interest has grown out of the sincere concerns of many secondary teachers and administrators who would like to find ways and means of providing a challenging learning environment for their more able students. Interest has also grown out of pressure from parent groups who have witnessed successful services for their children at the elementary level and therefore would like to see a continuation of these services in the junior and senior high schools. Administrators have also expressed concerns about the need for challenging programs that would help to stem the tide of high ability secondary students seeking alternatives in private schools. Perhaps the most prevalent reason for heightened interest in secondary programming, however, is the growing awareness on the parts of educators that many of the current provisions such as honors and advanced placement classes and acceleration procedures are simply not meeting the needs of many of our most able students. In fact, a recent study (Gold, 1980) showed that many of our most academically talented students are not even registering for more advanced-level courses and the Advanced Placement Program serves far fewer students than could benefit from these types of experiences (Marland, 1975).

In a recent study completed for the National Institute of Education, Cuban (1982) examined high schools at the turn of the century, in the two decades between the world wars, and from the mid 1960's to the present day. His conclusions confirm what many secondary teachers readily admit. "The overall picture of high school teaching since 1900 is striking in its uniformity: persistence of whole-group instruction, teacher talk out-distancing student talk, question/ answer format drawn largely from textbooks . . ." Cuban's research is consistent with other studies, most notably Goodlad's "A Study of Schooling" (1983) in which observers in high school classrooms noted that in the typical secondary classroom the teacher lectured to the whole class most of the time. In a study conducted by the National Science Foundation (1978), which randomly sampled over 5,000 U.S. high school teachers on their methods of instruction, similar results were found. Roughly, one-half to two-thirds of the responding teachers said that they taught their classes as an entire group. Since this preponderance of whole-group instruction in secondary schools seems to be a prevalent characteristic of many classrooms, the next logical question becomes: What is being done to meet the individual needs of students

whose learning characteristics differ from those of the group at large? Or the question may indeed be: Are individual differences in superior students being recognized and provided for in most secondary classrooms in the United States today?

Recent research studies also raise questions about the appropriateness of the curriculum used in many schools. Indeed, the well-publicized National Commission on Excellence Report (1983) states: "Secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted, and defused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose." Many sensitive secondary teachers have described to us their guilt and frustration as they watch bright students complete assignment after assignment of previously mastered work, work that could easily be eliminated and replaced with more challenging experiences if a more flexible approach to secondary programming was available. At the same time, teachers relate their frustration about having five or six classes a day with 20 or 30 students per class and their inability to find the time to substitute appropriate and challenging work for students who already understand the material and therefore need no further drill or review. These questions are especially relevant to persons interested in the gifted and talented because "individualization" has become a major emphasis in special programs designed for our more able students. The research, however, tells us that such individualization is virtually non-existent at the secondary level.

The Educational Products Information Exchange (1980-81), a non-profit educational consumer agency, revealed that 60% of the fourth graders in some of the school districts studied were able to achieve a score of 80% or higher on a test of the content of their math text *before* they had opened their books in September! Similar findings were reported with fourth and tenth grade science texts and in tenth grade social studies texts. Even when efforts to locate more challenging texts are made by individual districts, difficulties arise. According to Kirst:

Meanwhile, with regard to content and materials, a sample of U.S. publishers agreed that their textbooks had dropped two grade levels in difficulty over the last ten to fifteen years. According to the Los Angeles Times, when Californians tried to reserve two slots on the statewide adoption list for textbooks that would challenge the top one-third of students, no publisher had a textbook to present. They could only suggest reissuing textbooks from the late sixties (now unacceptable because of their inaccurate portrayals of women and minorities) or writing new ones, a three to five-year project. (1982)

VARIETIES OF PROGRAMMING ALTERNATIVES

In a review of the literature on secondary alternatives Silverman (1980) found over sixty provisions currently being used to provide services for gifted students at the elementary and secondary levels. Although each of these administrative patterns of organization has certain distinct features, for purposes of analysis we have grouped them into three broad categories. Before describing the categories, it is important to emphasize that any analysis of programs for the gifted must recognize the difference between administrative and theoretical models. Administrative models consist of patterns of organization and procedures for dealing with such issues as how we should group students, develop schedules for the time spent in special programs and arrange for the delivery of services. Theoretical models, on the other hand, consist of principles that guide the instructional process and give direction to the content, thinking processes, and outcomes of learning experiences that might take place within any given administrative pattern of organization. Theoretical models are mainly influential in determining the quality of special program experiences, whereas administrative models are more concerned with the efficiency and "smoothness" of special program operation and the way that programs "fit into" the total school program.

It should be pointed out that certain administrative models sometimes evolve into *de facto* theoretical models. Acceleration, for example, has traditionally been viewed as an administrative model; however, when it is used mainly to promote more rapid coverage of traditional subject matter, then it also assumes theoretical purposes. This analysis will use administrative models as an outline but a major concern will be the theoretical implications of each organizational pattern. Our three categories have somewhat awkward and non-traditional titles but this approach is necessary to highlight the discussion that follows. It is important to keep in mind that we are not presenting these categories as a practical guide from which persons can select options, but rather as a method for analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of each broad category.

Category I: Special "Editions" of Regular Courses

This category describes any course that students take in place of a regular course. A distinguishing factor of Category I is that the course is awarded academic credit and is a part of the student's regular schedule. These courses may require special admission procedures and they are ordinarily selected by

students on a voluntary basis. An eligible student might elect, for example, Honors English III in place of a regular junior year English course; but he or she would *not* have to take both courses. Similarly, college or university courses and any type of summer or evening course that substitutes for a high school requirement and is awarded replacement credit would fall into this category. Inclusive in this category would also be the Advanced Placement Program, courses offered within the school under the auspices of the International Baccalaureate Program, honors courses, or any other course that serves as a substitution for a regular graduation requirement. For purposes of convenience, we will also include in this category special schools for the gifted, the rationale being that in addition to the other advantages such schools might offer, they mainly consist of "collections" of advanced level courses.

Category II: "Extra" Courses, Seminars, or Special Electives

This category consists of any and all school-based experiences that eligible students may elect to take *in addition* to those courses that constitute their regular school program. Included within this category are scheduled time blocks in which students participate in a resource room or enrichment centers or activities. Students generally give up study halls to participate in these classes. These extra courses or enrichment experiences may or may not be taken for credit; but a distinguishing feature is that even when credit is awarded, the courses may not be substituted for a graduation requirement. These options are sometimes offered during an "extra period" attached to the school day. They can be scheduled within the day, on Saturdays, during evening hours, and before the school day begins.

Category III: Off-Campus Experiences

This category includes school and out-of-school apprenticeships, internships, mentorships and work experience programs. Included within this category are organized programs such as the Executive High School Internship Program, Junior Achievement, and participation in special programs offered by science centers, centers for the arts, or other places that offer special opportunities for students with advanced interests and/or abilities. As is the case of Category II, credit may or may not be awarded for these Off-Campus Experiences, and they are not ordinarily accepted in substitution for regular graduation requirements.