Second Edition

Curriculum Compacting

A Guide to Differentiating Curriculum and Instruction Through Enrichment and Acceleration

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EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

> All students, including those who are exceptional, are entitled to a publicly supported education in which instruction is geared to their needs, interests, and developmental levels.

We have seen and read statements similar to the one above on numerous school district websites, in handbooks, and in policy manuals across the country and the world. We have also read similar statements about the need for teachers to differentiate curriculum and instruction. The use of terms such as *personalized learning*, *differentiated learning*, and even *individualized learning*, is common in mission statements that promote the importance of meeting the needs of all students. Addressing all students' differentiated learning needs is indeed a noble goal, but most teachers have not learned a sufficiently broad and effective repertoire of skills and strategies to *implement* these policies and vision statements. Over the last four decades, we have watched many of our most highly able, academically talented and gifted students remain underchallenged in school. Our research on compacting demonstrates that too many spend most of their time in school in classrooms focused on skills or content that they have already mastered (Reis, Westberg, Kulikowich, & Purcell, 1998). These students and many of their age-mates too often tell us that school is "too easy" and that they spend far too much time during the school day on review and practice activities.

Many parents of high-potential students are also dissatisfied with their children's schools. They frequently mention the various ways in which educators struggle to meet the needs of these young people. Over the last four decades, we have spoken with literally thousands of parents who have told us that their academically talented students are both bored and disinterested in school. These parents frequently wonder when or whether their children's academic needs will

be met by the local school district. Unfortunately, even if there is a gifted program in the district, many smart and high-potential students still spend the majority of their time in regular classrooms, where they do not encounter challenging curriculum or instruction.

Many educators want to use innovative curriculum and instructional strategies that can be adapted to the learning needs, rates, and interests of all of their students. These same educators tell us that it is difficult to differentiate curriculum and instruction for all of their students given the broad range of instructional levels in their classroom. It is particularly challenging to differentiate for those who are achieving well above grade level. It is also difficult to meet the diverse needs of this group of students because most teachers do not have a professional background in teaching gifted students and the school curriculum often lacks appropriately challenging content and materials. Teachers consistently explain that differentiation:

- is difficult and challenging to accomplish;
- requires an inordinate amount of planning time to implement;
- must address a widening range of student achievement in the same class;
- is required for far too many students who are both above and below the grade-level curriculum;
- needs teachers to have extraordinary organization skills; and
- receives too little administrative support, materials, equipment, and funding to successfully enrich and accelerate learning.

Although we acknowledge that these challenges are real and that implementing compacting can be somewhat challenging, this updated book introduces new knowledge and techniques to help teachers overcome the obstacles they face.

The major purpose of this book is to help teachers learn how to compact, streamline, and enhance their grade-level curriculum to eliminate repetition of previously mastered material, challenge academically talented and above-average students, and create a differentiated, enriched, and accelerated learning environment for students who have already gained mastery of the regular curriculum, or who can, if given the opportunity, master the regular curriculum at a much faster and deeper pace.

Numerous examples of compacting are included in this second edition. These examples illustrate new approaches teachers can use to compact the curriculum and make instructional and curricular modifications for students. We know that many concerned teachers want to assign both challenging and engaging work, and we have tried to make our suggestions for compacting realistic and practi-

cal. It is our hope that curriculum compacting, a sequential, easy-to-follow, and well-researched strategy, will save time for *both* teachers and students.

Our work in compacting and curriculum modification has been carried out as a part of our Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) system. The SEM has been field-tested for the last four decades in various schools and districts throughout our country and internationally. Curriculum compacting is one of the three major components of the SEM, which is proven to be effective in reducing boredom for bright students as well as providing them with more challenging and enriching alternatives to the grade-level curriculum. To implement compacting, teachers must be able to identify the goals and standards within the grade-level curriculum, assess whether or not students have attained mastery of those goals, and provide enriching, challenging, and engaging alternate work for students who demonstrate competency. Compacting can be implemented for individual students or for groups of students who demonstrate high ability and achievement in any academic area, including the arts. In addition, compacting can benefit students who demonstrate strength or expertise in any specific content area, even if they are not formally identified as gifted learners.

In Chapter 1, we provide a history, background, and rationale for curriculum compacting. Chapter 2 includes a thorough explanation of each step in curriculum compacting, along with ideas for completing the process. Chapter 3 offers a series of ideas about replacement activities to use during time compacted by teachers. Chapter 4 offers numerous examples of differentiation strategies and options for enrichment and acceleration. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the professional strategies that can be used to help teachers implement curriculum compacting. Chapter 6 includes a set of case studies that reflect the challenges frequently encountered when implementing compacting. Chapter 7 focuses on assessment strategies that can be used to plan and prepare for compacting, and Chapter 8 includes the most frequently asked questions and answers about compacting and differentiating.

1 An Overview of Curriculum Compacting

How does compacting help gifted and advanced learners? Ask any academically talented or bright student about his or her school day or experiences and you will often hear the same adjectives: boring, dull, uninteresting, repetitive, and even mind-numbing. What is curriculum compacting? Compacting is a research-based procedure (Reis, Westberg, Kulikowich, & Purcell, 1998) that streamlines and eliminates previously mastered regular curriculum for students who are capable of completing content at a faster pace. It saves time by eliminating content that students have already mastered that can be used to provide alternative learning activities that address enrichment or acceleration.

Many of us remember Mark Twain's humorous commentary: "My education was only interrupted by the twelve years I spent in school." On a more contemporary note, Woody Allen provides a similar epilogue to his years of public education. "My teachers loathed me. I never did homework. I'm amazed they expected me to work on those sleazy projects. To this day I wake up in the morning, clutch on to the bed and thank God I don't have to go to school."

On a more personal note, we all have daughters who are advanced readers in school. When one of our daughters, a very advanced reader, ran away from school as a second grader, we found her trudging down a busy road on her escape route. She begged us to let her stay home to be able to do some work that was interesting, challenging, and just a little bit fun.

Some smart kids will, on occasion, encounter a wonderful teacher who inspires and sparks their interests, making learning enjoyable and interesting while these students are fortunate enough to be in this special classroom. The years spent with inspiring teachers are magical for all kids, and the best teachers continually challenge academically talented students to stretch themselves to higher levels. But, let's face it—*all students*, and in particular, our talented

students, deserve to have challenging, enjoyable learning experiences *throughout* their education.

There is little doubt that what smart and high-potential kids tell us about school is not just an anomaly, whether it comes from the students themselves or is stated in research about dropouts or high-achieving students from low-income families (Bridgeland, DiIulio, Morison, 2006; Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007). The majority of students, whether they are in school or have dropped out, say that school is just too easy, and that they would work harder if more was expected from them. In a national poll conducted by a nonprofit education group (Wolniak, Neishi, Rude, & Gebhardt, 2012), 88% of respondents indicated that school was too easy. Only 31% of respondents said that expectations at their schools were high or that they were being significantly challenged. In the same poll, 92% of students said they wanted a curriculum with more real-world experiences.

Gifted and Advanced Students' Learning Characteristics

Students identified as gifted or as advanced academic learners share some common characteristics. For example, students in this group often demonstrate strong cognitive skills or superior academic achievement. However, when it comes to characteristics such as learning styles, interests, prior educational experiences, specific academic and artistic strengths, and personal mindsets, this is a very heterogeneous group, with individuals who vary greatly. Knowledge of both the general descriptors that identify a student as a gifted learner, and the specific characteristics that define the child as an individual, are essential when making appropriate compacting decisions and plans. Of course, both sets of learner attributes also vary for the same child, depending on their grade or age when compacting is being implemented.

Table 1 contains the learner characteristics that can be used to describe each student's individual profile. It is in the best interests of both educators and students to take these descriptors into consideration during the multiple phases of the compacting process.

What defines and characterizes appropriate instruction for advanced learners varies widely, but it is always aligned to the strengths, needs, experiences, characteristics, and interests of each student.

Students come to school from different types of families and economic situations. Some children are fortunate to have enjoyed a broad array of preschool leaning and enrichment experiences, and others live in homes where no one has

TABLE 1
Learning Differences in Students

Cognitive aptitude
Current achievement within core academic areas
Schooling and educational history
Family and community culture
First language
Mindset (beliefs about the role of effort in relation to learning and achievement)
Learning styles (visual, auditory, tactile, concrete)
Interests
Talent development experiences and expertise
Product preferences
Self-regulation strategies and study skills

the time, resources, or skill set to read, play, converse, create, or explore with them on a regular basis. Children with these personal struggles are just as much in need of talent development opportunities and enriching and challenging school experiences as those fortunate enough to live in families who can provide these opportunities in a home setting.

A theme that has inspired our work for more than four decades is, "Schools should be places for talent and strength development." Enriching, challenging curriculum and instruction for high-potential and academically talented learners should engage and develop the talents of these students through rich and interesting learning experiences, characterized by exposure to the key concepts and principles of a discipline.

Joe's work on the Multiple Menu Model and our work on the Enrichment Triad and the SEM are based on these ideas. All students need interesting, meaningful content that is relevant to their personal preferences and experiences, and that piques their interests, encouraging them to seek more information and further exposure. Students also need learning activities that expose them to *new* ideas, concepts, people, places, and events. (We are so dedicated to this premise that it is a cornerstone of the Enrichment Triad Model; Renzulli, 1977.)