

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES TOWARD DIFFERENTIATING FOR GIFTED LEARNERS IN K-5 GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

by
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Abstract

Despite research that demonstrates the advantages of teaching gifted students in homogeneous groups, including more academic growth, better social and emotional health, and increased motivation, educational practice is shifting more and more toward total inclusion for all students, including the gifted.

Teacher attitudes and perceptions toward gifted students are variable and may correlate positively with certain demographic characteristics. Studies suggest that few teachers use differentiation strategies in their classrooms. Teachers who receive training and ongoing support in using a curriculum based on the Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) differentiate more often and more successfully than other teachers. Differentiated curriculum results in significantly higher academic growth than other curriculums. Research suggests a number of curriculum and instructional practices which align with the Integrated Curriculum Model and show promise with gifted learners.

This is a descriptive study of the attitudes and classroom practices of 59 classroom teachers in grades K-5. Teachers completed surveys which included the Attitudes toward Gifted Students and the Classroom Practices Questionnaire. The researcher conducted classroom observations using the Classroom Observation Scale-Revised. Survey and observation data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, T-tests, and ANOVA.

Findings suggest teacher attitudes ranged from somewhat negative to very positive with no correlation to the demographic data. Teachers were found to differentiate for gifted students infrequently, with a large number reporting that they never differentiate. They were also more likely to use strategies that have not been verified as gifted-friendly practice.

Recommendations for future research are centered in four areas: empirical research to further identify strategies and methods that benefit gifted students differentially to support or refute anecdotal evidence; research to study the efficacy of specific types of professional development that positively impact teacher attitudes and practices, especially toward gifted students in the regular classroom; research on the role of the administrator in promoting differentiated instruction, and the use of gifted-friendly practices to effectively differentiate for gifted students in the regular classroom.