

Differentiating for Gifted Students, Including Low-Income, Students of Color, or Those with a Learning Disability, in the Regular Class Room

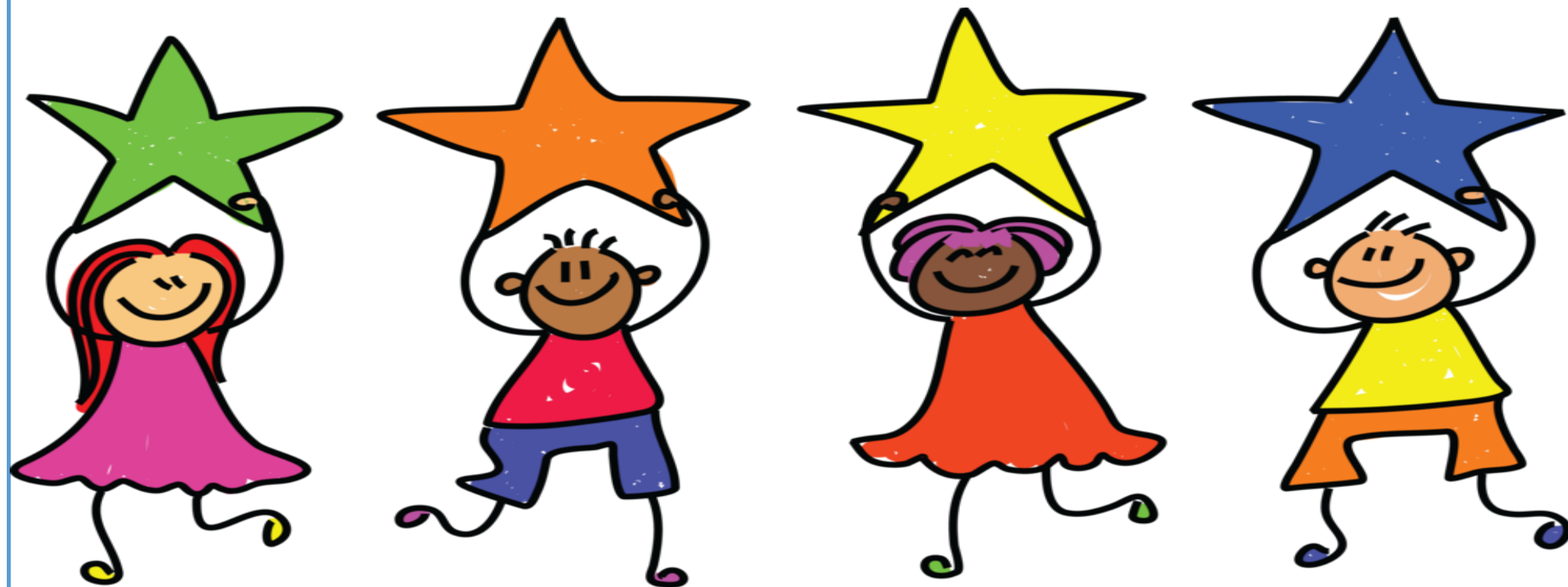
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Introduction:

A completely heterogeneous classroom of students will greet each teacher in California this year. It will include students with several different learning disabilities, students with limited English skills, students living in poverty, students of many ethnicities, and students who are gifted and talented. Of that group of students, the students who will probably learn the least during the school year are the gifted and talented students (Winebrenner, 2012). Why are our best students being shortchanged every year and what affect does it have on their future? Researchers estimate that between 18 and 25 percent of gifted students drop out of school prior to high school graduation – and the numbers are disproportionately high for students from lower socioeconomic and minority backgrounds (McClarty, 2014). Even when gifted students stay in school, for many, their actual achievement is far below what is expected (McClarty, 2014).

Creating a modified class room expectation for gifted students allows school to become a place in which they can learn and grow every day. Teachers must look at ways to motivate gifted students to continually challenge themselves on a daily basis. Fortunately, there are ways for teachers to do that. Unfortunately, it takes time and teacher motivation to create a learning experience for the gifted student.



Objectives

- This two-day professional development for secondary teachers will:
- Give teachers insight into recruiting non-traditional gifted and talented students, including twice-exceptional students (students with a disability), students living in poverty, ethnic minorities, and students for who English is a second language.
- Discover why gifted students are currently not progressing as they should progress in school.
- Learn how to differentiate lessons for gifted students
- Learn how to compact lessons for gifted students
- Learn how to differentiate and compact without adding hours of additional work for the teachers involved.



Materials and Methods:

Day One Talking Points:

- Gifted and talented: what does it mean to be gifted and talented?
- Learning and behavioral characteristics of gifted students
 - Perfectionism
 - Creative thinkers
 - Students who are twice-exceptional
 - The gifted underachiever
 - Students from diverse populations
- How to identify gifted and talented students
 - Teachers identify gifted and talented
 - Self-identification by gifted students
- Compacting and differentiating for skill work
 - Compacting Curriculum
 - Differentiating Instruction
 - Extension Activities
 - Strategies that work
- Compacting new content
 - The study guide
 - Tools to use with a study guide



Day Two Talking Points:

- Extending Reading and writing instruction
 - Characteristics of gifted readers
 - Contract for permission to read ahead
 - Reading Activities Menu
 - Contract for reading skills
 - Trade book reading program
 - Individualized reading
 - Vocabulary Activities
 - Biblio-therapy
- Planning curriculum for all students at the same time
 - Learning modalities
 - Taxonomy of thinking
 - Curriculum differentiation chart
 - Tiered learning experiences
 - Socratic seminars
- Genius Hour/Independent study
 - Personal interest study project
 - Topic browser planner
 - Resident expert planner
- Grouping Gifted Students
 - Cooperative Learning for gifted students
 - Cluster grouping

Results:

Educators can learn many things about gifted and talented education and students from this thesis. The literature points to several ways the current educational climate shortchanges these students: from the ways students are nominated and chosen for gifted and talented programs to the ways the gifted students' needs are often completely ignored. Teachers will learn several ways to create successful learning opportunities for their gifted students as suggested throughout the research. Many of the strategies covered in the two-day training can be implemented easily and without much cash outlay.

The limitations of this field project – a two-day training – occur because two days is not really enough time for teachers to feel that they are experts at gifted education. We have had many years of professional development in working with and understanding English language learners, resource students and high-risk students; but no professional development in working with gifted students. In order for teachers to develop any real proficiency in working with gifted students, additional trainings would need to occur. This professional development cannot be a one-time training and then focus on low-ability, low-income students. Gifted students deserve a more informed teacher who knows the best way to intellectually challenge gifted students (Winebrenner, 2012).

This program could easily be expanded to include an annual professional development opportunity on the many ways to entice gifted students in our classes. If the school district truly wants test scores and graduation rates to rise and drop out rates to decrease, they should plan for ways to allow gifted students to showcase their talents. Ignoring the needs of best and brightest has proven to be one of the downfalls of this district. Appropriate gifted and talented designations and education could transform VCUSD and move it out of the educational basement. The teachers and the gifted students simply need educational leadership and support to increase success (Winebrenner, 2012).



Conclusions:

This Field Project has met its objectives by educating teachers about gifted and talented students, including students they may not have previously considered as gifted. It also gives teachers concrete things they can do in their class room to make learning equitable for their gifted students. Teachers will learn how to change the content of their lessons to create rigor and interest, teach to different learning modalities and allow students to express what they have learned in ways that are compatible with their modalities, gain the ability to adjust the pacing of their lessons and adjust the amount of work for students.

After participating in the training, teachers will be able to better understand how people of different ethnicities and cultures display intelligence. Thus, they will be better able to interact more successfully with their gifted students and will gain the ability to recognize giftedness in its many forms.

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