

## Inclusion

Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education (since 1953)  
Affiliate Chapter of the National Association of Gifted  
A Special Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education Publication

Too often the reality for gifted students is that their needs are not met in the regular classroom.  
-- Carol Ann Tomlinson Introduction

The high profile status of inclusion for all students in today's increasingly politically correct school environment leads many to believe that this latest educational initiative is a panacea for curing what ails our schools. Inclusion advocates would have us believe that inclusive classrooms educate all students in the mainstream...providing [them with] appropriate educational programs that are challenging yet geared to their capabilities and needs as well as any support and assistance they and/or their teachers may need to be successful in the mainstream (Sapon-Shevin 1994).

Upon closer examination we see that most schools have neither the philosophy, curriculum, teaching strategies, resources, nor structural organization to effectively implement inclusion and continue to maintain rigorous academic standards for gifted learners.

PAGE is concerned about the implications of this practice for gifted learners. This Bulletin is intended to give PAGE members data, research, and suggestions in order to challenge prevailing ideologies that will have a negative effect on the quality of programming for the gifted, namely inclusion, and be more effective advocates for gifted learners. Some PAGE teachers and parents suspect that inclusion may be an overt and insidious attempt to dismantle special and differentiated programs for gifted and able children.

## Definition

Debbie Staub and Charles A. Peck define inclusion as: "the full-time placement of children with mild, moderate, or severe disabilities in regular classrooms. This definition explicitly assumes that regular class placement must be considered as a relevant option for all children, regardless of the severity of their disabilities. This definition, however, does not preclude the use of pull-out services or instruction in a self-contained setting, when appropriate." According to Douglas Fuchs and Lynn S. Fuchs: "Full inclusionists [are] those who argue for a complete dismantling of special education--no more special education placements, no more special education students, no more special education teachers (for example, Stainback and Stainback 1992); and those who say special educators should provide services to disabled (and nondisabled) students, but only in regular classrooms (for example, Giangreco et al. 1993)." Consider the following:

- Special programs for advanced learners (as for learners with handicaps) are typically established because those students' needs are not being addressed in general classroom settings.
- Conditions that make it difficult for classroom teachers to adapt instruction for varied learning needs continue to be pervasive after decades of reform efforts. Impediments include large class sizes, competing demands on teacher time, and lack of teacher skill and comfort with designing and implementing curriculums that are concept-based, problem-oriented, student-centered, and multi-intelligent. It is not surprising, then, that most classroom teachers still do not differentiate instruction for academic diversity (Bateman 1993, Archambault et al. 1993, McIntosh et al 1993, Westberg et al. 1993).
- Research further indicates that teachers are more inclined to make adjustments for struggling learners than for advanced ones. Teachers often have negative attitudes about gifted learners or perceive that the gifted will make it on their own (Tomlinson et al. 1994b, Crammond and Martin 1987).
- Although educators talk a great deal and rightly so about ensuring equity and quality of educational opportunity for at-risk learners, there is virtually no parallel emphasis on providing high-end excellence and access for advanced learners. Results of inclusion even for special education learners on whom inclusion efforts have been primarily focused are far from unanimously positive. (Hallahan and

Kauffman 1994, International Institute for Advocacy for School Children 1993).

By adopting the notion that "gifted education is just good education for everyone," are we once again looking for a one-size-fits-all solution, or are we willing to grapple with the complexities of student needs for differing approaches to content, process, and product in a single inclusive classroom? Educational Leadership, Vol. 52, No. 4, Dec 1994/Jan 1995 Inclusion: More Implications

Advocates of de-tracking are today calling on schools to eliminate all forms of ability grouping. Meta-analytic results suggest that this proposed reform would damage American education. Teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents should be aware that student achievement would suffer from the wholesale elimination of school programs that group students by aptitude. The harm would be relatively small from the simple elimination of multi-level classes in which high, middle, and low groups cover the same curriculum. If schools replaced all their multi-level classes with mixed-ability ones, the achievement level of higher aptitude students would fall slightly, but the achievement level of other students would remain the same. If schools eliminated grouping programs with differentiated curricula, the damage to student achievement would be greater, and it would be felt broadly.

Both higher and lower aptitude students would suffer academically from elimination of such programs. The damage would be truly great if, in the name of de-tracking, schools eliminated enriched and accelerated classes for their brightest learners. The achievement level of such students would fall dramatically if they were required to move at the common pace. No one can be certain that there would be a way to repair the harm that would be done.

Kulik & Kulik, Gifted Child Quarterly, Vol 36 No. 2, Spring 92

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### The Gifted Learner Is Underserved

Exalting heterogeneity as the most effective means of grouping, as well as the most ethical, (as it allegedly fosters a strong sense of community) full inclusionists refuse to allow highly able students out of the classroom for pull-out and other enrichment programs. They cite research that says that all students benefit from an inclusive classroom, deftly ignoring more recent sophisticated research that concludes that ability grouping, when accompanied by appropriately differentiated curricula, is effective for all learners (especially the highly able) and is injurious to no one. Full inclusionists insist that the building of community, rather than an appropriately challenging, democratic education, is of ultimate importance. I disagree. Granting primacy to full inclusion for the purpose of "building community" is misguided in both its means and its end. First of all, full inclusion is as likely to arouse righteous indignation as engender empathy. Additionally, the vast majority of Americans are far more interested in classrooms with order, discipline, and high academic and behavioral standards than with "building community."

Authentic communities are a worthy, but derivative, consequence of an appropriate education, a by-product of individuals pursuing relevant, challenging curricula. However, such a community is virtually impossible if predatory classmates (however small their number) continue to unnecessarily distract the class.

And what of the most underserved, underfunded population in our schools, the gifted learner?

The U.S. Education Department released a report in 1993 entitled, "National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent," estimating that less than 20 percent of gifted students are appropriately challenged in school, a situation described as a "quiet crisis." But a crisis with loud repercussions. Consider the evidence offered by our best students' embarrassingly low standing relative to previous generations of U.S. students as well as current international comparisons.

Additionally, research regarding curricular options has shown that a wide variety of curricular and student-based services is necessary to meet the needs of the gifted population.

That dictum corresponds precisely with the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association recommendations for inclusion-- namely, that schools continue to offer "a full continuum of placement and service options." And that approach, of course, also insures that students from both groups

are afforded the least-restrictive environment for their education.

Full inclusion joins a long list of reforms that either disregard, misrepresent, or are oblivious to the research on gifted students and the ramifications such reforms may have on them. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of full inclusion is that, once again, a very small, disproportionately influential group of advocates, pursuing primarily a social rather than an academic agenda, is gaining favor with policymakers who appear eager to mandate programs with little regard for research, public or practitioner opinion, or potential long-term consequences.

It is time to resurrect public education's most urgent goal: producing a generation of informed, capable students. And it is way past time to reassert the most effective means of doing so. To achieve that goal, we must offer a flexible, open-ended, diverse menu of education options that both reflects and accommodates our highly diverse student population.

Stephen Schroeder-Davis, President  
Minnesota Council for Gifted & Talented  
Excerpted from Education Week  
February 22, 1995, Vo. XIV

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### Where is the Academic Challenge?

Inclusion advocates claim inclusion does not harm non-disabled students. They note that the research seems to indicate there are benefits for these non-disabled students, and identify five positive themes: Reduced fear of human differences accompanied by increased comfort and awareness.

- Growth in social cognition-- students demonstrate more positive feelings about themselves.
- Improvements in self-concept and self-esteem as a result of relationships with individuals with disabilities
- Development of personal principles.
- Warm and caring friendships emerge between students with and without disabilities.\*

There is no doubt that these benefits are worthwhile ones, and are important outcomes for students. A concern among advocates for gifted education is that this research seems to point to an increased emphasis and correctness for development of student affect at the expense of academic rigor. Gifted students need to be immersed in content and concepts of substance. They require courses and assignments that demand both intellectual challenge and a rich understanding of the social and emotional implications related to their in-depth study. The underlying question or concern for PAGE members is how will inclusion assure that a full range of intellectually demanding options are made available to gifted and very able students?

\* Educational Leadership, Jan 1995, Vol 52, Staub & Peck

### Guidelines for Grouping Practices by Karen B. Rogers.

- Gifted and talented students should spend the majority of their school day with others of similar abilities and interests.
- Cluster grouping of a small number of students within an otherwise heterogeneously grouped classroom can be considered.
- Gifted and talented students might be offered specific group instruction across grade levels.
- Gifted and talented students should be given experiences involving a variety of appropriate acceleration-based options.
- Gifted and talented students should be given experiences which involve various forms of enrichment.
- Mixed-ability cooperative learning should be used sparingly for gifted and talented students, perhaps only for social skills development programs.

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## Guidelines for Ability Grouping by James A. Kulik

- Although some school programs that group children by ability have only small effects, other grouping programs help children a great deal. Schools should therefore resist calls for the wholesale elimination of ability grouping.
- Highly talented youngsters profit greatly from work in accelerated classes. Schools should therefore try to maintain programs of accelerated work.
- Highly talented youngsters also profit greatly from an enriched curriculum designed to broaden and deepen their learning. Schools should therefore try to maintain programs of enrichment.
- Bright, average, and slow youngsters profit from grouping programs that adjust the curriculum to the aptitude levels of the groups. Schools should try to use ability grouping in this way.
- Benefits are slight from programs that group children by ability but prescribe common curricular experiences for all ability groups. Schools should not expect student achievement to change dramatically with either establishment or elimination of such programs.

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### An Excerpt: Listen In... Can Inclusion Work?

(A Conversation with Jim Kauffman and Mara Sapon-Shevin) Where do you see the inclusion movement going?

Sapon-Shevin: The idea is that we want to create a world in which all children are welcome, in which all children grow up comfortable with, knowledgeable about, and supportive of, all kinds of other children. Inclusion is consistent with multicultural education, with wanting to create a world in which many more people have opportunities to know, play, and work with one another. So I can't foresee the many people who have fought so hard for their children's right to be full members of the community changing their minds.

Of course, I also worry a lot that school districts will do inclusion badly, that they'll leap into it with no planning or preparation...

Inclusion will succeed to the extent that it links itself with other ongoing restructuring efforts: with the detracking movement, authentic assessment, site-based management, and so on. Restructuring means looking at not just what kind of classrooms we want, but what kind of a world we want, and how we prepare children to be members of that broader community.

It does appear that some schools manage to serve all kids in regular classrooms, while others almost reflexively place students elsewhere.

Kauffman: I agree that there are differences in the capacity of schools and teachers to deal with differences. But we don't have research showing that all students can be taught well in regular classrooms and regular schools. Reflexive placement decisions are bad practice and illegal, whether the reflex is to place children in regular classrooms or elsewhere.

Trying to force everybody into the inclusion mold promises to be just as coercive as trying to force everybody into the mold of special class or institution. There are wide differences in children's needs and the kinds of environments that can address those differences. Inclusion is going to be great for some kids, and some parents will love it. The opposite is also true. I believe in giving options to parents and kids. A continuum of placement options is sensible; it's also the law.

Much of the support for inclusion seems to be coming from people who are dissatisfied with the outcomes of special education.

Kauffman: Well, there are two points to consider. One is that some studies do show that students have performed better in pull-out programs than in the regular class. The other point is that it's far more important to improve instruction for kids in alternative settings than to try to get all kids into regular classes. The fact is, we need different instruction for different kids, and you can't have all types of instruction happening in the same place at the same time. Some kids learn very well through an exploratory approach, for example, but others don't learn well this way. Direct instruction is going to produce much better outcomes for them. I think the literature is very clear on that.

Some, like deaf kids, need special instruction that can't be provided in a regular class. Many kids with severe emotional or behavioral disorders need a more supportive environment than any regular classroom can possibly provide. Besides, research on inclusion shows that the results for many kids are disappointing. It is possible for kids to do worse, both academically and socially, in inclusive settings than in alternative placements.

Educational Leadership, Dec 94/Jan 1995

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Increased Inclusion and Regular Education as an Option for Gifted Students:  
Some PAGE Considerations

PAGE leadership has noted several principles or considerations as guidelines for parent and educator advocates to use before schools move to full or partial inclusion. They are: Regular education placement should be accompanied by instruction and use of materials that challenge the gifted.

Inclusion should not be a code word for cost cutting or for the dismantling of existing gifted education programs because of current and misdirected "politically correct" ideology.

Inclusion into the regular classroom of both disabled and gifted students should be driven by the multiple discipline planning team (MDT) recommendations and be based on specific IEP present educational levels of the gifted student. The outcomes for such placement must include high academic and content related expectations.

Inclusion and the use of the teacher of the gifted as a regular education consultant should be implemented only after extensive staff development and a framework for use of challenging curriculum have been established.

There is insufficient evidence to support increased achievement and self esteem on the part of the gifted when mainstreaming is increased or inclusion extended. In reality, research indicates the opposite.

Inclusion and increased regular education placement may continue to lead us down the path of "dumbing down" the curriculum for many gifted learners.