

Fighting the War on Academic Terrorism

While the attention of the country is focused on the global and national war on terrorism, the war on academic terrorism is being waged in our classrooms, infiltrating our gifted programs, and altering the outcomes derived for students participating in gifted programs. The war on academic terrorism is related to the broad areas of curriculum and instruction and have their roots in the national and distinct initiatives aimed at eradicating the “enemies” thwarting academic success. Ironically, these very initiatives are inhibitors to the academic success of gifted students and form the “enemies” fanning the war on academic terrorism. “Time” is one of the major academic terrorists.

“Time” as an academic terrorist assumes many forms, as can be seen in the development and administration of pacing charts used to guide the scope and sequence of the curriculum and determine the schedule for its unfolding. Admittedly, pacing charts have been designed to respond to many current educational issues. It is difficult to argue with the concept underscoring pacing charts: the need to direct the teaching and learning process so that significant ends are met within a given period.

However, it is *not* difficult to argue against the practical implementation of this concept. The idea that, “If it is Wednesday, we should be teaching and learning X as identified by the subject area pacing chart” seems to negate attention to individual differences, the perception of the teacher as a professional decision maker, and the intent of identifying and responding to giftedness. Rigidly allocating teaching and learning time solely according to a

prescriptive pacing chart discounts the use of time aligned to the demands of the area to be studied, prerequisite learning, individualized or group definitions of mastery or academic success, and the essentials of learning styles.

A classroom that is adhering to the pacing chart developed and monitored by district educators states clearly that, on a given day, the lessons should include specific principles within an expected time frame. The expectation for compliance is valid; the expectation for compliance without insight and modification by the teacher is not. While the specifications on a pacing chart have been designed for the norm of learners within the class and provide assurance for the rights of learners to access the curriculum, there are those students—gifted learners and others—who languish restlessly in the lesson without any recourse but to wane in their enthusiasm for learning and sometimes engage in learning that is executed to fill the time, rather than the commitment to academic success. A pacing chart that is supposed to be generalized to the entire class is a cause of underachievement for gifted students.

“Time” is an academic terrorist when the differentiated tasks are more expansive than the time allocated to complete them. As educators become more sophisticated in the development of curricula that parallel the elements of an appropriately differentiated learning experience for gifted students, the quality of expected productivity must be commensurate to the quantity of time required for produc-

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early gifts

recognizing and nurturing children's talents

edited by paula olszewski-kubilius, lisa limburg-weber, and steven pfeiffer

a comprehensive new resource for parents of gifted children

In this resource for parents of gifted children, leading experts discuss how to recognize and nurture talent in preschool- and elementary-school-aged children. An introductory chapter provides a framework for understanding the major contributing factors to the development of talent, including the home, the school, outside programs, and the personality of the individual child. The next seven chapters each deal with a major area of talent: music, the visual arts, drama, language arts, science, mathematics, and athletics. In each chapter, the authors identify early behaviors indicative of potential talent and discuss how parents can create a home environment that both elicits and develops their child's special abilities through activities, games, and play. These experts advise when parents should consider more formal instruction in a talent area or supplement school programs with enrichment and home study and criteria to use in order to select good programs. Several chapters address other related issues, including how to work with school personnel effectively to develop an educational program that is appropriate for a child talented in science, mathematics, or the language arts. A final chapter addresses some of the psychological issues relating to gifted children, including four guiding principles to promote their healthy development. These include, for example, promoting the development of social intelligence. Each chapter presents practice and scholarly research in a practical way to help parents with their gifted children.

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tive work. Many gifted students are working to match the time given to them, rather than etching time needed to do "good work." This is not to say that meeting time requirements is not necessary. However, it is important to acknowledge the need to be able to negotiate time so that productive, original, satisfying work can be accomplished by gifted students. When queried as to why his work did not meet his potential, a gifted student responded with this question: "Do you mean I can lose my potential if there isn't enough time to use it?"

"Time" is an academic terrorist when the teacher adjusts a lesson to meet the daily schedule, rather than allowing the lesson to absorb as much time as is needed. Recent observations in elementary and middle school classrooms have shown a pattern wherein teachers omit elements of a lesson such as motivation and feedback in the interest of time and "meeting the bell." In many situations, the lessons ends abruptly with directions stated by the teacher to try to do the assignment and a promise that the class will review the understandings and skills in the lesson on the next day. This pattern provides insufficient time to discuss and reinforce learning and results in gaps in knowledge and partial mastery of skills. Comments by teachers questioning "the true nature" of a student's giftedness might be more a consequence of time given to lessons by teachers than the current identification of students as gifted.

The elusive and difficult nature of combating the global war on terrorism is quite evident. Fighting some of the features such as "time" that represent the war on academic terrorism seems less elusive and far easier to win. [GCT](#)