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Distinguishing Myths From Realities: NRC/GT Research

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How well do you know the research findings of the NRC/GT? We developed a quiz to test the extent to which you can really identify what the research says. You often see and hear the phrase "the research says" to support a strongly held viewpoint. But you should ask yourself, does it really say that? We scanned 11 NRC/GT publications and modified or quoted findings. See how well you know the research by marking each statement with (M) Myth or (R) Reality.

- _____ 1. Cooperative learning in heterogeneous groups provides academic benefits for gifted and talented students.
- _____ 2. Acceleration options such as early entrance, grade skipping, early exit, and telescoping tend to be harmful for gifted and talented students.
- _____ 3. Gifted and talented children should spend the majority of their school day with others of similar abilities and interests.
- _____ 4. When using cooperative learning, student achievement disparities within the cooperative groups should not be too severe.
- _____ 5. Cooperative learning can be effectively substituted for specialized programs and services for academically talented students.
- _____ 6. There is some evidence that labeling a child gifted has a positive impact on his/her self-esteem.
- _____ 7. Gifted students have lower self-esteem than non-gifted students.
- _____ 8. Schools should call for the elimination of ability grouping because ability grouping has negative effects on student achievement.
- _____ 9. Bright, average, and slow youngsters profit from grouping programs that adjust curriculum to the aptitude levels of the groups.

- _____ 10. Highly talented youngsters profit from work in accelerated classes as well as from an enriched curriculum.
- _____ 11. Creativity tests are an effective means of identifying artistically gifted and talented students.
- _____ 12. In identifying artistically gifted and talented students, attention should be paid to potential and works in progress as well as to final performance and products.
- _____ 13. Television is bad for young gifted children.
- _____ 14. Primetime, commercial television offers inadequate and inappropriate role models for gifted children.
- _____ 15. Creativity in children is a sign of and a contributor to psychological health.
- _____ 16. Parenting gifted young children is labor intensive.
- _____ 17. Gifted children identified during their preschool years tend to stay ahead of other children with regard to academic performance.
- _____ 18. Teachers need to show students examples of superior student work in order to challenge them to ever increasing levels of math achievement.
- _____ 19. Talented students are capable of greater mathematical power than we have ever asked of them.
- _____ 20. Early reading and writing skills should keep pace with each other.
- _____ 21. In exemplary programs for gifted and talented students, the provision of challenges and choices are major influences on increasing student achievement and motivation.

Now check your responses with the following key. The explanation and relevant resource follow. Should you want more information about the finding, please consult the appropriate NRC/GT publication.

Research Documentation

1. *Cooperative learning in heterogeneous groups provides academic benefits for gifted and talented students.*

Myth: Mixed-ability cooperative learning should be used sparingly for students who are gifted and talented, perhaps only for social skills development programs. Until evidence is accumulated that this form of cooperative learning provides academic outcomes similar or superior to the various forms of ability grouping, it is important to continue with the grouping practices that are supported by research (Rogers, 1991).

2. *Acceleration options such as early entrance, grade skipping, early exit, and telescoping tend to be harmful for gifted and talented students.*

Myth: Students who are gifted and talented should be given experiences involving a variety of appropriate acceleration-based options, which may be offered to gifted students as a group or an individual basis. It is, of course, important to consider the social and psychological adjustment of each student for whom such

options are being considered as well as cognitive capabilities in making the optimal match to the student's needs (Rogers, 1991).

3. *Gifted and talented children should spend the majority of their school day with others of similar abilities and interests.*

Reality: Both general intellectual ability grouping programs (such as School Within a School, Gifted Magnet Schools, Full-time Gifted Programs or Gifted Classrooms) and full-time grouping for special academic ability (such as Magnet Schools) have produced marked academic achievement gains as well as moderate increases in attitude toward the subjects in which these students are grouped (Rogers, 1991).

4. *When using cooperative learning, student achievement disparities within the cooperative groups should not be too severe.*

Reality: When high, medium, and low achieving students are grouped together, high achieving students explain material to low achieving students, and medium achieving students have fewer opportunities for participation. Academically talented students report frustration when working in mixed ability groups with team members who are unwilling to contribute to the group goal. Placing students who are similar in achievement together continues to allow for heterogeneity in terms of ethnicity and gender in the groups. Cooperative learning might be used with groups of high achieving students (Robinson, 1991).

5. *Cooperative learning can be effectively substituted for specialized programs and services for academically talented students.*

Myth: Cooperative learning in the heterogeneous classroom should not be substituted for specialized programs and services for academically talented students. Cooperative learning models have not been compared to special education programs and services for academically talented students in the research literature. Thus, no clear superiority for cooperative learning in the heterogeneous classroom over specialized programs and services for academically talented students has been established. Even advocates of cooperative learning have acknowledged the need for separate course offerings for academically talented students (Robinson, 1991).

6. *There is some evidence that labeling a child gifted has a positive impact on his/her self-esteem.*

Reality: The label of gifted may influence a student to have more confidence in his/her own ability (Hoge & Renzulli, 1991). This has also been noted in the literature with regard to the Pygmalion effect and self fulfilling prophecy.

7. *Gifted students have lower self-esteem than non-gifted students.*

Myth: The majority of studies seemed to indicate somewhat higher levels of general and academic self-esteem for the exceptional group (Hoge & Renzulli, 1991).

8. *Schools should call for the elimination of ability grouping because ability grouping has negative effects on student achievement.*

Myth: On the contrary, Kulik (1992) found youngsters of all achievement groups benefited from ability grouping programs when the curriculum was appropriately adjusted to the aptitude levels of the groups and cautioned that if schools eliminated grouping programs with differentiated curricula, the damage to student achievement would be great. He indicated that higher and lower aptitude students would suffer academically from elimination of grouping. Conversely, he cautioned that schools should resist the call for the elimination of the use of ability grouping.

9. *Bright, average, and slow youngsters profit from grouping programs that adjust curriculum to the aptitude levels of the groups.*

Reality: Cross-grade and within class programs are examples of programs that provide both grouping and curricular adjustment. Children from such grouping programs outperform control children from mixed classes by two to three months on grade-equivalent scales (Kulik, 1992).

10. *Highly talented youngsters profit from work in accelerated classes as well as from enriched curriculum.*

Reality: Talented students from accelerated classes outperform nonaccelerates of the same age and IQ by almost one full year on the grade-equivalent scales of standardized achievement tests. Talented students from enriched classes outperform control students from conventional classes by four to five months on the grade-equivalent scales (Kulik, 1992).

11. *Creativity tests are effective means of identifying artistically gifted and talented students.*

Myth: Caution should be exercised in using creativity tests as a means of identifying artistically gifted and talented students. Creativity tests are used to measure problem solving skills and divergent thinking abilities applicable to a variety of situations. Many contemporary researchers and writers, however, have asserted that the concept of creativity often is poorly understood and poorly defined and that there are no reports of the validity of creativity tests in predicting success in gifted and talented programs for students with high abilities in visual arts (Clark & Zimmerman, 1992).

12. *In identifying artistically gifted and talented students, attention should be paid to potential and works in progress as well as to final performance and products.*

Reality: Many programs for artistically gifted and talented students are based upon defining art talent as the ability to create a superior product or perform in a distinguished manner. Many art educators are now eliminating such requirements; they are expressing concern for students' interest and desire to participate and their potential for performance. Researchers will be challenged to develop methods of identifying students with potential to perform at high levels of ability in the visual arts and at the same time access emerging skills, cognitive abilities, and affective abilities through work in progress, as well as final products (Clark & Zimmerman, 1992).

13. *Television is bad for young gifted children.*

Myth: Young gifted children spend significantly more hours in front of the television set than their same-age peers, but viewing does not necessarily warrant parental concern or dramatic time reductions or limitations. Sizable viewership of television programming at a very early age is reflective of gifted children's natural attraction to accessible and interesting sources of information. TV viewing during the preschool years is not a dysfunctional behavior unless it is taking place of, rather than complementing, other viable means of information (e.g., books); limiting interaction with parents and other children; and resulting in long-term viewing habits of a similar nature. This is not usually the case and once children enter the formal school system, their overall TV viewing drops dramatically (Ableman, 1992).

14. *Primetime, commercial television offers inadequate and inappropriate role models for gifted children.*

Reality: Only 9% of all the new programming during the past decade has had one or more children in the starring or title role, despite that over 17% of the nation's population is under 13 years of age. Gifted children are also highly underrepresented and typically depicted as social misfits (Ableman, 1992).

15. *Creativity in children is a sign of and a contributor to psychological health.*

Reality: It can be difficult to tolerate the individuality and nonconformity of highly creative students, but it helps to remember that creativity is an important personal asset (Runco, 1993).

16. *Parenting young gifted children is labor intensive.*

Reality: Parents report spending considerable time with gifted young children in reading, playing, making up rhymes and songs, and going to interesting places (Robinson, 1993).

17. *Gifted children identified during their preschool years tend to stay ahead of other children with regard to academic performance.*

Reality: Longitudinal studies of preschoolers identified for their early-emerging abilities (not just high test scores) find that they do maintain long-range momentum, even though it may not be as dramatic as when first seen. Early entrance to school is, therefore, one way to meet the needs of some young gifted children (Robinson, 1993).

18. *Teachers need to show students examples of superior student work in order to challenge them to ever increasing levels of math achievement.*

Reality: Talented math students need standards and models. Superior student work can serve to reinforce the development of emerging math skills (Sheffield, 1994).

19. *Talented students are capable of greater mathematical power than we have ever asked of them.*

Reality: When compared to students from other industrialized nations, our students lag far behind in the development of their mathematical skills, due largely, in part, to the fact that we do not expect them to achieve at great levels (Sheffield, 1994).

20. *Early reading and writing skills should keep pace with each other.*

Myth: Contrary to this commonly held belief, there is no relationship between reading and writing skills in the development of talented young children (Jackson & Roller, 1993).

21. *In exemplary programs for gifted and talented students, the provision of challenges and choices are major influences on increasing student achievement and motivation.*

Reality: Themes in exemplary gifted and talented programs identified included: Leadership (strong administrative voice to represent and implement the program); Atmosphere and Environment (supportive, accepting, and positive throughout the school); Communication (clear and frequent between and among parents, teachers, students, and administrators); Curriculum and Instruction (teachers' flexibility in matching to student needs); and Attention to Student Needs (commitment to serving students from traditionally underrepresented populations). In addition, the exemplary programs were found to influence student achievement and motivation through exposure to challenge and choices.

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