Reading Instruction With Gifted and Talented Readers:

A Series of Unfortunate Events or a Sequence of Auspicious Results?

by Patricia F. Wood

To borrow from Lemony Snicket, mysterious author of the book collection titled *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, if you are interested in articles with happy endings, you would be better off reading a different one . . . or maybe not. Read on.

As a dedicated, diligent, and effective teacher of reading, you expect a *happily ever after* outcome for your students. You expect your efforts as a reading instructor to have a happy ending: children who love to read and who develop into competent, capable readers. For struggling and at-risk readers, a happy ending is especially joyous. But what about the readers who enter your classroom already demonstrating high levels of expertise with text, those identified as gifted,

talented, high-ability, advanced, or precocious readers? Most might say they have their happy ending because they have become successful readers. Yet, there is potential unfulfilled. For gifted and talented readers, how do we ensure that their potential is achieved, the guarantee of a *happily ever after* ending?

The enigmatic Mr. Snicket is quick to establish from the start that happy events are not to be expected in his story. Every happy event in the lives of the three clever and charming Baudelaire children is countered with an even more unfortunate one, events rife with misery, misfortune, and despair. Violet Baudelaire and her brother, Klaus, a gifted reader, use their wits and intellect to create a sanctuary for themselves and their little sister Sunny in the midst of catastrophe and gloom. As is typical of gifted children, the Baudelaires have hopes of bringing order to the chaos in their lives. Violet's inventive mind along with Klaus' extensive knowledge gleaned from his insatiable love of reading and books enable the Baudelaire children to overcome devastating calamities.

This unfortunate story line is mirrored in many classrooms where gifted and talented readers sit patiently (or not so patiently!) awaiting their turn for reading instruction that is cognitively challenging and motivating. Like Klaus Baudelaire, many gifted children find sanctuary in books. This article explores a discouraging and very real tragedy for many gifted and talented readers: the unfortunate yet unnecessary disparity between what they need from a reading instructional program and what classroom instructional practices typically provide.

An All Too Unfortunate Scenario

Teaching reading is a time-intensive task. In elementary classrooms across the country, teachers allocate large blocks of time to reading instruction. Sitting in their classrooms are students who display a wide range of reading abilities, from nonreaders to the highly competent. Reading strategies and activities must be orchestrated to match individual instructional needs. Juxtaposed with their struggle to address the diverse learning needs of their students are federal mandates, state standards, and local curriculum requirements. It is no wonder that teachers often feel frustrated, out of control, and dispirited. Yet most teachers use their passion for teaching, their training in best practices, and their creativity to design learning opportunities matched to their students' needs. Unfortunately, many of these teachers, although highly trained in how to teach reading to beginning and struggling readers, have received little or no professional development in how to meet the needs of their gifted and talented readers, as evinced in the following vignette:

It's 8:45 AM on a typical school morning in Mrs. Wyatt's second-grade class. During an unannounced "walk-through" to observe reading instruction, Ms. Sanders, the school's principal, observes children involved in a variety of reading activities. Mrs. Wyatt, sitting at a half-round table, is surrounded by four children who are reading from decodable texts. The principal sees Jason, Ramon, and Alisha sitting at computers listening with headsets to a story on CD. Under a rainbow-striped umbrella sitting side-by-side in kid-sized beach chairs, Joseph is reading haltingly to Melissa, who offers him assistance with unfamiliar words. Rodney, Dominick, and Sarah are busy at their desks writing in their reading response journals while Alex and Stacy work energetically at the "Make a Word" center, using magnetic letters to create words on small whiteboards. In the back corner of the room, Carlos, Molly, and Elizabeth are sitting on oversized pillows reading silently.

During her visit, the principal notices that every 20 minutes or so, students are regrouped and participate in different reading activities with the exception of the three students sitting on pillows reading silently. During her hour visit to the classroom, Ms. Sanders notes that students are engaged in an array of reading strategies and activities. However, she is puzzled by the three students who never leave the floor pillows where they are reading silently. Later that day in her conference with Mrs. Wyatt, Ms. Sanders asks about the three children who were reading silently. "During the hour I was in your room, I noticed Carlos, Molly, and Elizabeth reading silently, but I didn't see them rotate to other reading activities." To that, Mrs. Wyatt replied, "Oh, they are my top readers. They already know how to read, so I've told them to just read their books."

Unfortunately, this scenario is all too familiar: gifted and talented readers left out of reading instruction. And, although allowing advanced readers such as Carlos, Molly, and Elizabeth to read silently from books at their reading level is preferable to forcing their participation in activities designed for beginning or struggling readers, they are nonetheless being shortchanged. They deserve a reading instructional program that offers challenge and is differentiated based on their intellectual and emotional needs.

The Characters in This Unfortunate Story

Gifted and talented readers present a unique challenge for elementary teachers by virtue of their salient characteristics. By definition, they are advanced in intellectual and linguistic abilities. Experts in the fields of gifted education and reading identify gifted and talented readers as students who read and comprehend text 2 or more years beyond their chronological grade placement as measured on a standardized reading test or who have the potential for high reading performance. In the traditional sense, a gifted reader may or may not have been identified as gifted in accordance with state or district eligibility guidelines for gifted education services. Likewise, because "giftedness" is not restricted to strengths in the verbal domain but may be evidenced by giftedness with mathematics or creative talent, a gifted child may or may not be identified as a gifted reader. Although an exceptionally high IQ is not necessary for a student to be a gifted reader, research confirms that gifted and talented readers tend to have above-average general intelligence.

Gifted and talented readers read easily and voraciously, with amazing speed and incredible comprehension. They also are passionate about what they read. For them, reading is not the mere process of translating symbols into meanings but an intense need to explore, investigate, fantasize, and make connections with concepts and ideas. Gifted and talented readers are, by definition, highly verbal and use advanced language and vocabulary with ease. They also may excel in many areas of reading and language arts, such as creative writing, literary analysis, oral communication, linguistic and vocabulary development, critical and creative reading, and foreign language (VanTassel-Baska, 1994). Paradoxically, educators may consider reading instruction for gifted readers as somehow unnecessary.

A Tragic Tale of Disregarded Readers

In 1993, the United States Department of Education released its report, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* regarding the status of education for gifted and talented students. In that report, it was noted that, although substantial strides had been made in providing educational opportunities for gifted and talented students, the nation was facing a "quiet crisis" of unrealized potential with its youth. Although the report emphasized that effective programs for gifted and talented students may be found throughout the

country, many high-ability students spend the majority of their school day in general education classrooms where the curriculum is often unchallenging and instructional practices are geared to average and below-average learners. This is clearly evident in the teaching of reading.

With the current climate of educational accountability, high-stakes testing, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandate to raise reading and math scores to proficiency levels, school districts are not as concerned with instructional methods and curricula for students functioning at proficiency levels or above. In order to meet the mandate, additional services, such as afterschool tutoring, must be made available to those students targeted for intervention. District administrators often find they must reallocate resources in order to provide these services. In many states, this has meant eliminating or severely reducing other programs, such as those for gifted and talented students.

According to Tomlinson (2002), "there is no incentive for schools to attend to the growth of students once they attain proficiency, or to spur students who are already proficient to greater achievement, and certainly not to inspire those who far exceed proficiency" (p. 36). Because gifted and talented readers have moved beyond the proficiency level and because differentiating reading instruction is a demanding task, teachers are less likely to spend time with their advanced readers (Kingore, 2002). While differentiated instruction is common practice with struggling readers, research findings regarding classroom practices and observations of gifted and average students indicate that few modifications are made for the gifted students in heterogeneous general education classrooms (Reis et al., 2004). It should come as no surprise then that above-grade-level readers often are left out of the reading instructional plan.

Although current emphasis on instruction for struggling readers is understandable and warranted, it may lead to a potentially serious consequence: the lack of appropriate reading instruction for gifted and talented readers. One of two situations seems prevalent: (a) reading practices and materials for gifted and talented readers are the same as those used with average readers (basal or grade-specific reading textbooks with accompanying workbooks and skill-based worksheets), or (b) gifted and talented readers are relegated to independent reading, with little or no teacher instruction or input to stretch and challenge them. For high-ability readers, potentially undesirable outcomes of either situation may include stagnant reading growth, underachievement, boredom, low motivation for reading, or outright refusal to read.

Table 1
Gifted and Talented Readers: Myths and Truths

Myth: *Gifted and talented readers as a group are homogeneous and should receive the same reading instruction.*
Truth: Gifted and talented readers are a diverse group with varied intellectual, emotional, cultural, and linguistic differences. Although we would expect that the majority of advanced readers are highly competent readers, there may be students who have gaps in reading skill development due to cultural or linguistic differences or who exhibit a specific learning disability. Similar to struggling readers, advanced readers should have an appropriately individualized program designed to meet their needs.

Myth: *Gifted and talented readers are experts at text comprehension.*
Truth: Most gifted and talented readers have highly developed comprehension skills, especially in comparison to their age peers. However, even advanced readers benefit from instructional strategies for developing greater insights into the subtleties of literary selections, understanding nuances of meaning, and mastering advanced-level informational content.

Myth: *Gifted and talented readers should be given complete control over their choice of reading materials.*
Truth: Choice in reading materials is one of the essential components of a reading program for gifted and talented readers. It is important, however, for these students to be exposed to a wide range of genre, styles, and topics, and to learn how to discern good from mediocre literature. Teacher guidance (prodding!) might be in order to broaden their repertoire of reading material.

Myths and misconceptions abound regarding gifted readers (see Table 1). Unfortunately, separating myth from truth has been a challenge for educators, leading to misunderstandings about who gifted readers are, what they need from a reading instructional program, and how their needs best can be addressed. Case in point:

> Consider Molly, one of the students in Mrs. Wyatt's second grade. Molly has been reading since age 3 when her parents first realized she could read billboards, cereal boxes, and Dr. Seuss books. She started kindergarten with a backpack full of her favorite books by Patricia Polacco, Roald Dahl, and Jan Brett. Now, at age 8, Molly avidly reads classics, such as *Little Women*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Charlotte's Web*. Molly is a gifted reader. Molly is also an enigma to her teacher. Because she can

Table 2
Program Goals for Reading Instruction With Gifted and Talented Readers

- Expose students to challenging reading material
- Deepen reading comprehension skills
- Expand students' metacognitive processes during reading
- Develop critical reading, including interpretation and analysis of text
- Foster an appreciation of diverse, multicultural literature across multiple genre
- Provide opportunities for group discussion of selected texts
- Encourage creative reading behaviors, including writing and dramatic interpretation
- Promote motivation and enjoyment of reading through choice and self-selection of texts

easily read and comprehend text at a fifth-grade level, the requisite second-grade reading instructional strategies are inappropriate and unnecessary. Her teacher, who has not received training in ways to differentiate the reading curriculum for advanced-level readers, is unsure of how to best provide reading instruction for her gifted readers. Moreover, school district policy requires that all elementary students must participate in basal text activities, thus making it difficult for Mrs. Wyatt to excuse Molly and the other high-end readers from basic instruction, even though their reading skills are well beyond the second-grade basal text.

Gifted readers like Molly too often spend time in low-level reading activities, such as completing phonics worksheets and whole-group basal reading, neither of which offers opportunities for challenge or growth in reading development. If, as we must assume, a reading program for gifted and talented readers should emphasize reading to learn rather than learning to read, then program goals should be differentiated from those of beginning or struggling readers (see Table 2).

Constructing a Sequence of Auspicious Results for Gifted and Talented Readers

To date, there have been few research studies regarding appropriate reading instructional programs for gifted and talented readers. However, gifted education experts advocate reading instructional practices, such as homogeneous grouping, acceleration, and enrichment, in conjunction with opportunities for discussion, access to challenging literature, and strategies to foster critical, creative, and inquiry reading (Bonds & Bonds, 1983; Cassidy, 1981; Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Collins & Aiex, 1995; Dooley, 1993; Labuda, 1985; Reis & Renzulli, 1989).

Figure 1 illustrates the key components of a reading program for gifted and talented readers. These key components include:

- *Assessment*: Use of inventories, checklists, and other instruments to assess reading level and student reading interests.
- *Grouping*: Flexible grouping based on reading level and student interests.
- *Acceleration*: Above-grade-level, advanced reading materials, often faster paced, based on student assessment data; easily accomplished through flexible grouping practices.
- *Enrichment*: Interest-based reading that extends and broadens reading opportunities.
- *Opportunities for discussion*: Formal or informal discussion of assigned or self-selected texts, such as literature or Socratic circles, book chats, Junior Great Books, or book clubs.
- *Challenging literature*: Reading materials with advanced vocabulary, sophisticated themes, and abstract or metaphorical concepts.
- *Critical reading*: Inferential and interpretative reading, involving a deeper understanding of text.
- *Creative reading*: Imaginative, inventive response to text, through writing, performance, or divergent thought.
- *Inquiry reading*: Self-selected independent research project in which a student investigates a real problem and presents findings to an authentic audience.

One word of caution: Some teachers may assume that simply assigning challenging reading material to gifted readers meets the requirement as an appropriate instructional practice. There is an important difference between *assigning* challenging literature and *teaching* students how to read challenging literature.

Homogeneous Grouping

Ability grouping for reading instruction has been a long-standing practice in schools, with three ability groups (below average, average, and above average) as the traditional grouping strategy. The use of ability grouping in schools is a controversial topic that continues to spark heated debate. In the field of gifted education, proponents of grouping (Kulik, 1992; Rogers, 2002; Tieso, 2003) argue that grouping of gifted learners allows for effective and efficient curriculum and instruction for students who learn at a faster rate and who need broadened

and extended content. Highly vocal opponents of tracking (Oakes, 1985; Sapon-Shevin; 1994; Slavin, 1991), the politically incorrect evil twin of grouping, contend that equity and equality of educational opportunities suffer when homogeneous groups are formed, and that all students' needs can be met within heterogeneous classrooms. According to Slavin, "the great majority of students can and should learn together" (p. 69). Kulik disagreed, citing studies that suggest grouping combined with appropriate differentiated instruction may lead to substantial gains in academic performance for highly able students. Furthermore, Kulik asserted that less able students are not harmed by grouping strategies, noting that greater academic progress can be made when they are placed in homogeneous groups in which instruction is tailored to their specific needs.

Philosophical and political issues aside, reading experts (National Reading Panel, 2000) advocate the use of grouping practices for reading instruction for beginning, at-risk, and struggling readers. In this sense, grouping can be regarded as an instructional practice necessary for reading achievement. Grouping allows for differentiation or modification of the reading program based on a student's level of competence and programming needs, which should be extended to include the needs of advanced readers as well. For gifted and talented readers, flexible grouping offers a number of benefits and options: grouping based on reading interests, such as a literature circle or an author study; grouping with either the teacher or another student as facilitator for activities such as inquiry-based projects; or grouping based on like needs of students for specific instruction with a strategy or skill. Regardless of the purpose for the grouping, gifted readers prefer and should be grouped with peers who work at similar ability levels.

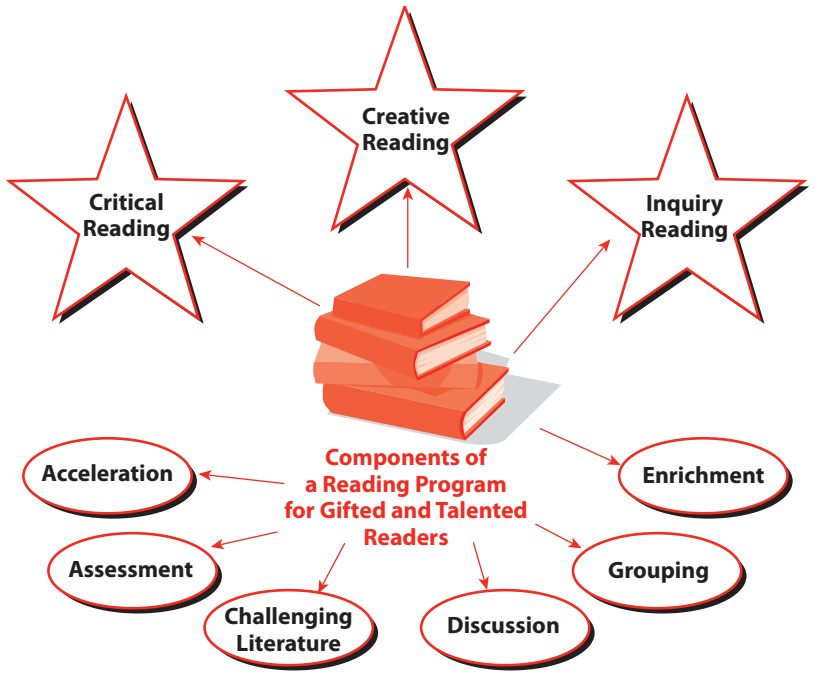

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Figure 1. Components of a reading program for gifted and talented readers.

Acceleration

Many gifted and talented readers enter school demonstrating exceptional talent. Acceleration by advancing these students to their instructional level regardless of their grade placement is an appropriate decision. Students such as Molly, who is reading well beyond her grade peers, would benefit from opportunities to share reading experiences with other students who read at a similar level. Cross-grade grouping is one instructional practice that would allow for advanced readers to benefit from acceleration while maintaining important social connections with same-grade peers. For example, gifted and talented readers from grades 2 and 3 could be grouped with a teacher trained in reading instruction for advanced readers. Most important is teaching students how to tackle challenging text so that they can move from surface understanding to deeper meaning. As discussed earlier, one of the myths about gifted readers is their ability to comprehend text at deep levels. Even the most exceptional readers can benefit from strategic instruction in analysis and interpretation, with emphasis on metaphoric and reflective thinking about text.

Enrichment

The most widely used method for meeting the needs of highly capable students is enrichment. For gifted and talented readers, enrichment would include expanding the range of reading material beyond that of the regular curriculum to include a variety of topics and genre and individualizing the reading instructional program to reflect the gifted reader's personal interests.

Recently, a group of researchers (Reis et al., 2004) at The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (University of Connecticut) developed a framework for addressing the needs of all readers based on the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli, 1977) and the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1985), which encourages enjoyment in learning and the opportunity to pursue creative work. The *Schoolwide Enrichment Model Reading Framework* (Reis et al., 2002) consists of three components of reading instruction: (a) Phase 1: exposure to high-quality, exciting literature through teacher read-alouds and higher order thinking questions; (b) Phase 2: training and discussions on supported independent reading, with one-on-one teacher conferences on reading strategies; and (c) Phase 3: interest and choice components, including genre studies, creative thinking, investigation centers, buddy reading, literature circles, creative and expository writing, Internet and library exploration, and independent investigations. The Phase 3 component of this model is most appropriate for use with gifted and talented readers because it supports independent, self-selected reading opportunities that experts in gifted education advocate. Their findings suggest that enrichment strategies increase motivation for reading, which is key to increasing the amount and variety of reading.

Opportunities for Discussion

Grouping gifted and talented readers for discussion fosters interactions with peers who enjoy exploring text at a higher level of abstraction. Discussion groups may be as simple as an unstructured book chat between two students about the latest in the series of unfortunate events for the Baudelaire children or as highly structured as a literature or Socratic circle (Copeland, 2005; Daniels, 1994). An excellent program that uses a discussion format is Junior Great Books (Great Books Foundation, 1992). The Junior Great Books program is designed to develop critical thinking and reading skills through the use of authentic literature. Its shared inquiry approach stimulates lively text discussion vis-à-vis open-ended questioning that challenges students to think critically about the reading assignment, develop their own interpretations, and support their ideas with evidence from the text. Regardless of which type of discussion format or approach is used, the opportunity for gifted and talented readers to discuss themes, characters, author's perspective, or emotional response to a piece of literature is an essential component of their reading program.

This article is not suggesting that opportunities for discussion, or any of the strategies and activities recommended herein, are only appropriate for advanced readers. All students need access to appropriately challenging curriculum and engaging instructional activities, including participation in literary-based discussions. Heterogeneous discussion groups help build community in classrooms by encouraging students to accept opinions and ideas of others. With classrooms more diverse than ever, in terms of ability as well as socioeconomic, cultural, and racial backgrounds, whole-class discussions can foster understanding while improving critical thinking, listening, and oral communication skills.

Copeland (2005) recommended using Socratic circles in multiple-ability classrooms as a way of developing social as well as academic skills. In Socratic circles, students read critically, annotate, and then discuss a short piece of teacher-selected text. The discussion is student-led, with the teacher's role as guide on the side. Unlike literature circles that typically involve a smaller group of students, each fulfilling a predetermined role, Socratic circles include the entire class without specified roles. Students form two circles, an inner and an outer circle. The inner circle, seated on the floor, begins the discussion of the text using Socratic-type questioning techniques. Seated in chairs, students in the outer circle listen to the discussion and make notes in order to offer feedback regarding the conversation among the students in the inner circle. At a particular point, the two groups reverse position and the discussion begins with a new inner circle. Socratic circles are an engaging and powerful learning experience for students of all ability levels

Using Literature to Address Affective Needs

Bibliotherapy can be useful in helping gifted students grow emotionally and socially. However, bibliotherapy easily can be extended for use in mixed-ability classrooms. Students may respond affectively to a teacher-led discussion of a book, poem, or article that has a strong message or character. In most instances, the teacher reads the book or passage aloud, after which she asks a series of

questions. Preliminary questions may focus on comprehension of the events, characters, or ideas. However, the crux of bibliotherapy is to move the questions beyond the story, encouraging students to make personal insights and use the story as a catharsis for their feelings. For example, *Frederick* by Leo Lionni is a story about a little mouse that daydreams the summer away to the dismay of the other mice who busily gather food. However, when winter comes, it is Frederick, the poet mouse, that provides glorious words to help the mice endure the cold, dreary days. This story can be used in bibliotherapy to help children understand individual differences and the importance of valuing each person's gifts and talents.

Access to Challenging Literature

According to Trezise (1978), reading instructional programming must take learning differences into consideration. He cites these differences as "timing and pacing, depth and degree, teaching style and materials, and student response" (p. 743). Providing a quality differentiated instructional program commensurate with reading abilities is the primary goal. Differentiation of content through available literature is the key to achieving this goal. Experts in the field of gifted education have long advocated that in order for advanced readers to develop literacy skills in accordance with their abilities and interests, appropriate reading instructional practices should offer more than traditional basal reading texts. Because gifted and talented readers have little need for skill-based reading instruction, the use of typical classroom basal texts and workbooks is inappropriate, and even may have a negative effect on advanced readers' attitudes toward reading.

Access to challenging reading materials appropriately aligned to instructional reading level and interests is the primary consideration for highly able readers. As mentioned previously, there is a difference between *assigning* challenging literature and *teaching* students how to read challenging literature. Although reading more advanced-level books certainly will increase vocabulary and stimulate thinking, teachers can assist their gifted and talented readers in developing deeper understandings and application through activities such as Socratic questioning, metaphorical thinking about text, and analysis of literary elements.

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Critical Reading

Critical reading involves the reader in asking questions, forming hypotheses, making judgments, and solving problems based on evidence from the text (Collins, 1995; Gallagher, 2004). As indicated previously, because gifted and talented readers attain independence in reading earlier than most students, instruction should move from a focus on skill development toward instruction in inferential and interpretive reading, such as:

- analyzing text to detect author bias;
- inferring hidden meanings;
- locating, organizing, and synthesizing information related to a given topic; and
- understanding elements in literature including figures of speech, connotations, idioms, plot, characterization, setting, and voice.

Creative Reading

Creative reading is considered the highest yet most neglected form of reading (Witty, 1985). In creative reading, the printed page serves as the source for imaginative and original thought production by the reader. For creative readers, the text becomes the impetus for research discoveries, divergent responses, and invention. For example, creative reading activities for the Lemony Snicket books might include writing of scripts and dramatization based on one or more of the books, creation of original unfortunate events for the Baudelaire children, or songs or poetry to accompany the stories.

Inquiry Reading

Inquiry reading (Cassidy, 1981) offers gifted and talented readers the opportunity to conduct independent research in an area of particular interest. Cassidy's inquiry reading strategy stresses the importance of self-selection of the topic to be researched. In his 4-week program, gifted readers select a topic, carry out research, and present their findings to others.

> Carlos is passionately interested in astronomy and space exploration. As a voracious reader of both science fiction as well as informational text about space, he has amassed a huge personal collection. Last summer, he lived his dream of becoming an

astronaut by attending Space Camp in Huntsville, AL, where he spent a week participating in simulations as part of a flight team. Carlos has a very sophisticated telescope that he uses to study and map the night sky. He has followed the journey of the Hubble telescope through space via NASA's Internet Web site. After visiting the local museum's exhibition of artifacts from early space exploration, Carlos talked with the curator about his interest in space, especially the photos from Hubble. He has decided to create a PowerPoint slide show for the museum's exhibit with photos taken by early spacecraft and compare those with photos from the Hubble, along with narration describing the advancements in our space knowledge.

Clearly, Carlos' inquiry-based project is self-selected, requiring advanced-level thinking. He will use his skills as a gifted reader to comprehend sophisticated and technical terminology as he writes the script for narration with the slide presentation. This instructional strategy accommodates learning style preferences of gifted students by putting the student in the role of an actual investigator of a real problem. Inquiry reading is similar to Type III activities in Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Model (1977). In Type III activities, students initiate an inquiry based on personal interest focusing their research on solving a real-world problem rather than simply "looking up information" for a class assignment. In this way, they move beyond consumers of knowledge to become producers of new knowledge. Independent study, long considered one of the major strategies for differentiating curriculum for gifted and talented students, builds on student interest and curiosity while teaching the planning and research skills necessary for self-directed learning. In choosing to conduct an independent study, the student would read a variety of books related to a topic of investigation, plan the investigation, and collect data. Generally, the student would be expected to develop or create some type of product or performance at the completion of the study. In order for gifted and talented readers to have time to conduct their independent study projects, curriculum compacting often is used to "buy" or secure the necessary time.

Curriculum compacting is a strategy for streamlining and modifying the curriculum by eliminating material that students have previously learned through the use of preassessments to determine mastery or competence (Reis, Burns, & Renzulli, 1992). Curriculum compacting affords gifted and talented readers time for participating in a stimulating and creative reading program, with replacement activities that meet their need for challenge and personal involvement. Their reading program should focus on content and process modifications that reflect gifted students' instructional needs. Another cautionary note: avoid replacement activities that are "more of the same." Marching through the basal reader at a faster pace is not an appropriate modification for most gifted and talented readers.

A More Fortunate Reading Scenario

Let's revisit Mrs. Wyatt's second-grade class to see a more fortunate reading program for her gifted readers, Carlos, Molly, and Elizabeth.

Mrs. Wyatt has adjusted her centers to include opportunities for inquiry and independent research, creative reading tasks, and access to more challenging literature. These centers are designed to offer several levels of challenge, which are available to all of her students, not just the gifted and talented readers. Mrs. Wyatt has begun providing instruction to her gifted readers that encourages more complex thinking about the text, teaching them how to analyze story structure and evaluate author intent, as well as how to use metacognitive strategies while reading. Rather than spending extended periods in silent sustained reading, the gifted readers are participating in flexible and collaborative groups, such as a literature circle with average-ability readers, Junior Great Books for above-grade-level readers, and author studies for all readers. Individually, the three gifted readers are given choices in what they want to read and what types of reading response activities they prefer doing. Carlos, the budding astronomer, searches the Internet for the latest information and photos from the Hubble telescope to add to the multimedia presentation he is creating for the museum, while Molly and Elizabeth work on a book of poetry they hope to have published and placed in the library.

Because reading instruction in most elementary schools is provided within the context of general education, classroom teachers are responsible for designing the reading program for their advanced readers. Many school districts have gifted education specialists who are trained in the learning needs of the gifted and talented. A collaborative effort between the general educa-

tion teacher and a gifted education specialist might prove advantageous in the development of a differentiated reading program for gifted readers. Without proper program design, guidance, and instruction, maximal reading achievement will rarely occur for gifted and talented readers.

A Fortunate Ending

As is true for any student with a special gift or talent, a gifted reader needs to have her gift nurtured. This nurturing must begin early and be maintained over time if it is to flourish. By providing the young gifted reader with a challenging instructional program and high-interest reading curriculum, her reading progress will reflect a sequence of auspicious occurrences that result in positive educational outcomes . . . a series of fortunate events with a happy ending. GCT

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