



# **Grouping Students to Maximize Gifts, Talents, & Potential: What Gifted Students Say Works for Them**

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# Statement of Problem/Significance

- Placing students in groups is an instructional practice utilized on a regular basis within secondary classrooms.
  - 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills
  - Teacher Evaluation Rubric
- Research has provided convincing evidence that cooperative learning has positive effects on student achievement, attitudes, and perceptions across disciplines and at all grade levels (Kyndt et al., 2013).
- Despite such success across educational settings, very little research has examined the impact of grouping strategies on gifted or advanced learners, especially at the high-school level.
- Many gifted students express displeasure/frustration at being asked to work in groups.



# Example of Classroom Teacher Evaluation Rubric

QUALITY STANDARD II				
Teachers establish a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment for a diverse population of students.				
Basic	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
<b>ELEMENT C:</b> Teachers engage students as individuals with unique interests and strengths.				
<b>THE TEACHER:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <i>Implements lessons that reflect student interests.</i></li></ul>	<b>... and THE TEACHER:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <i>Encourages students to expand and enhance their learning.</i></li><li>○ <i>Acknowledges students for their accomplishments.</i></li></ul>	<b>... and THE TEACHER:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <i>Asks appropriately challenging questions of all students.</i></li><li>○ <i>Scaffolds questions.</i></li><li>○ <i>Gives wait time equitably.</i></li><li>○ <i>Ensures that all students participate in class activities.</i></li></ul>	<b>... and STUDENTS:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <i>Actively engage in classroom activities.</i></li><li>○ <i>Discuss content or make connections between curriculum, lesson and interests.</i></li></ul>	<b>... and STUDENTS:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <i>Encourage fellow students to participate and</i></li><li>○ <i>Engage in collaborative learning and group processes.</i></li></ul>



# Purpose

- The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand gifted high school students' perceptions related to grouping practices in the classroom and to explore the impact such practices have on their attitudes toward group work.



# Research Question

- *What are the experiences of high school gifted students when working in groups at school?*



# Qualitative Methodologies

## Epistemology

- Constructionism- individual meaning making through social interaction (Crotty, 1998)

## Theoretical Framework

- Interpretivism- meaning is derived from participation in social & cultural life (Crotty, 1998)

## Methodology

- Phenomenological research- use of rich description to understand multiple individuals' experiences of a phenomenon

## Methods

- Questionnaires- Likert-scale screening tool; open-ended
- Semi-structured, individual interviews



# Participants and Context

- **28 High School Students Participating in a 2-week, Summer, Residential Leadership Camp for Gifted Students**
  - Camp Located in Rocky Mountain Region of the United States
  - 16 Juniors; 12 Seniors
  - 14 girls; 14 boys
  - Colorado (11 Front Range; 10 Denver-Metro; 1 Boulder Valley; 1 Western Slope)
  - New Mexico (1); Tennessee (1); Georgia (1); California (2)



# Data Collection

- Feelings Towards Group Work Questionnaire (Cantwell & Andrews, 2002)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Questionnaire to Allow for Open-Ended Responses
- Semi-Structured Individual Interviews



# Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis of questionnaire responses and interviews using inductive reasoning
- Comparison to previous studies regarding gifted students' perceptions



# 6 Themes

## ***1) Difficult to Trust Others***

- **Sub-Themes:**
  - Others don't complete work
  - Others don't complete high-quality work
  - Others not as motivated to get good grades or to learn from assignments

## ***2) Frustration with Process***

- **Sub-Themes:**
  - Forced accountability for others' learning/grade
  - Grades suffer due to poor performance/lack of commitment of other students in group

## ***4) Sense of Loss of Control***

- **Sub-Themes:**
  - Resigned to lack of quality experience or product
  - General acceptance of a bad situation



# 6 Themes

## ***4) Sense of Responsibility***

- **Sub-Themes:**
  - A good leader is instrumental
  - High expectations for themselves when interacting with others
  - Reflective about role in group
  - Situation often stressful because of the responsibility

## ***5) Empathy for Others***

- **Sub-Themes:**
  - Understanding of other students' situations and perspectives
  - Respect and appreciation for teachers and understanding of their decisions

## ***6) Working in Groups Can Be Beneficial***

- **Sub-Themes:**
  - Shared responsibility/participation/commitment
  - Ability to progress at appropriate rate
  - Similar ability/motivation



# Theme 1: Difficult to Trust Others

- **Students described working in groups as a situation in which the other members of the group often could not be counted on to carry their share of the weight. Most students' primary experience was working in mixed-ability groups.**



# Theme 1: Difficult to Trust Others

- *“I feel like every time I’m forced to work in a group with other people, I end up carrying the group, and I do most of the work.”*
- *“Not [that they won’t] do anything, just not the important stuff. They won’t do it right, or they’ll do a bad job. It won’t make sense.”*
- *“Situations where people were unmotivated and not confident in their abilities led to a lack of work ethic.”*



## **Theme 2: Frustration with the Process**

- **Students expressed a general frustration with the practice of grouping in their classrooms. They believed that it was not personally beneficial academically.**



## Theme 2: Frustration with the Process

- *“The work that gets turned in that’s not from me is not how I want it to be done, so I end up getting a worse grade because of it.”*
- *“I don’t think there is anything wrong with group work, but making gifted kids teach the others is cruel and lazy.”*
- *“There has to be a better way.”*



# **Theme 3: Sense of Loss of Control**

- **When assigned to groups, students anticipated a poor outcome but felt they had little control to influence it for the better.**



# Theme 3: Sense of Loss of Control

- *“There’s nothing you can do...that’s something I’ve accepted many, many, many years ago.”*
- *“Two people did nothing. And I mean, I simply accepted it. I just knew that was going to happen; I accepted it.”*
- *“My partner plagiarized, and there was nothing I could do because he wasn’t finished with his part the Sunday before it was due on Monday...and apparently his work wasn’t his work.”*
- *“When other people don’t do things, it’s beyond your control. Like what do you do when it’s already turned in and they didn’t do something?”*
- *“I wish there were some freedom for me to say to my group members, ‘I’m not doing all this work.’ But if I don’t do it, my grade suffers.”*



# Theme 4: Sense of Responsibility

- **Still, students took their leadership role (whether teacher or self assigned) within the groups seriously and felt a personal responsibility to make sure the assignments were completed well.**



# Theme 4: Sense of Responsibility

- *“I know I’m going to get it done, so I will take on that larger part for myself.”*
- *“If I’m in a group project, my group is going to get a good grade on that project because I will ensure that whether I have to do the entire project by myself and be up late at night doing it because nobody else will do it or because I know how to divvy up the tasks correctly, and everybody understands that I feel that way.”*
- *“If the leader fails, it could be detrimental to the success of the group, and I don’t like to be the reason that my group fails at something.”*



## **Theme 5: Empathy for Others**

- **Students repeatedly rationalized why other students “let them down” in group situations, stating that they understood.**
- **They also expressed a desire to help others as long as they were not taken advantage of, and they appreciated what a hard job it was to be a teacher and to have to try to figure out something that worked for everyone.**



# Theme 5: Empathy for Others

## STUDENT SPECIFIC:

- *“No hard feelings toward him. I understood what he did...it’s in the past.”*
- *“I don’t blame my partner because he had family situations going on, but you know, it wasn’t really that hard a project.”*
- *“I guess she had something going on, so I’m not really too mad at her about it, but it was kind of a bummer, but it wasn’t bad.”*
- *“I didn’t feel like there was a reason for her to have to suffer so late and so hard when I could get it done for her without an issue.”*



# Theme 5: Empathy for Others

## TEACHER SPECIFIC:

- *“I understand that you cannot always allow a group of kids to consistently not do anything all class. So that’s why they can’t pick their own groups...I understand that. I don’t like it, but that is actually what it is.”*
- *“I put my benefit of the doubt in the teachers, even though I stick very strongly to my opinions. I feel like teachers have the hardest job out there.”*
- *Teachers have hard jobs. I would give that power [to decide on groups] to them, even though it doesn’t necessarily work well.”*



## **Theme 6: Working in Groups *Can* be Beneficial**

- **Students expressed much more satisfaction when working with students of similar commitment and capability, although the opportunity to do this was rare.**



## Theme 6: Working in Groups Can be Beneficial

- *“It was nice because everybody had an idea, and everybody contributed something, and there was always a different way to look at the same situation or a different way to solve whatever task we were supposed to solve.”*
- *“No one in the group is held back or doesn’t want to do the project.”*
- *“Situations where everyone had similar skill levels and everyone was motivated to get it done allowed for collaboration and didn’t involve a lot of whining.”*



# Suggestions from Gifted Students

- **Let us choose our own groups.**
  - Students felt they benefited from groups where there was intellectual compatibility and where students within the group had similar expectations and levels of motivation.
- **If you're going to choose our group members for us, be thoughtful about it.**
  - Social lives matter; academic needs matter; personalities matter.
- **Be thoughtful about how you structure the group activities.**
  - Provide us with the parameters and support we need to be successful, but allow us some flexibility in how we meet the requirements- and build in some individual accountability (hold us accountable for our own work- not everyone else's).



# Discussion and Implications

- Results of this study indicated that utilizing grouping strategies, particularly heterogeneous grouping strategies, within the secondary classroom was not perceived as beneficial by gifted students *when the purpose of group work was for individual academic growth.*
- Being forced to work in groups was typically more stressful for these students than if they could have done the entire assignment by themselves.
- It is *possible* that more of a true cooperative learning model would alleviate some of the concerns expressed by these gifted students; however, this is not documented in existing research for gifted students. (And gifted students still need opportunities to work with other gifted students.)



# Discussion and Implications

- Even Johnson & Johnson (2009) and Slavin (1994) acknowledged the use of homogeneous cooperative learning groups to meet the needs of advanced/gifted students.
- Teachers may need support in effectively grouping gifted students.
- Teachers need to be clear about the purpose of different types of grouping they utilize in their classrooms (and communicate this to their students).
- Further research is needed to understand how social and cultural aspects of giftedness affect working in groups.



# Limitations

- Generalizability
- Limited diversity of sample
- Retrospective



# Final Thought

- Gifted students need the opportunity to interact with a diverse population of students, and they need the opportunity to be appreciated for their strengths and to put those strengths to use for the good of others- but it should never be at the expense of their own social and emotional or intellectual and academic wellbeing.



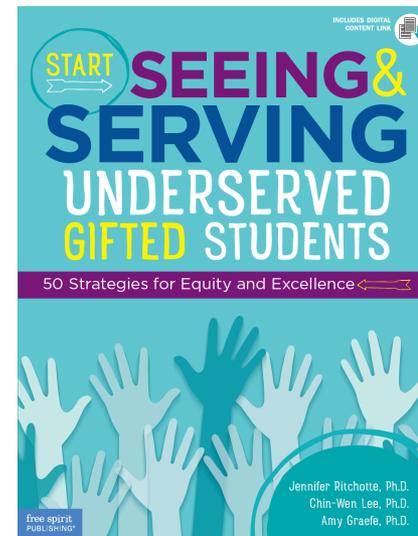
# For presentation or for more information...

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