Post-It Planning Pyramid

For Promising Pupils

Revised Article

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Do you need a way to plan and explain gifted and talented programs at regional meetings? Do you need a planning tool for a subject or year level or a simple individual educational plan for identified students? Consider using this efficient individual educational plan.

POST-IT PLANNING PYRAMID
FOR PROMISING PUPILS

The Pyramid Model, an outgrowth of a survey from 3,000 regions in the US, has proved useful in categorising and summarising programs and services for gifted students. This article extends the model into an active planning and reference tool for school regions.

BACKGROUND ON THE
PYRAMID MODEL

The Pyramid Model was the result of an extensive four-year study by the Sid W. Richardson Foundation of Fort Worth, Texas. The project, described in detail in Educating Able Learners (Cox, Daniel and Boston, 1985), sets out to discover what programs exist, which programs were most effective and what recommendations would assist other regions in serving able learners.

The primary recommendations were:

* That a written philosophy for the education of able learners is needed for each school region and community.

* That flexible pacing be adopted at all levels, recognising that all students do not learn at the same rate.

* That the process of assessing student abilities be broadened in recognition that all students' abilities should be assessed and that there is neither a single kind of intelligence nor a single instrument for measuring intelligence.

* That schools avoid labelling any group of children as the gifted.

The study found two main options for serving able learners. The primary option was a part-time pullout model used in schools. This model has certain concomitant problems:

* Highly visible and easy to install, but limited in year levels

* Usually does not relate to the regular classroom

* A part-time solution to a full-time need

* Selection criteria often rigid

Enrichment in the regular classroom, the other option used most frequently, while laudable in theory, often was not comprehensive or part of a planned program. Beyond these weaknesses in the two most used options, the study details "programs and promising practices" many of which were found to be successful and transferable.

The elegance of June Cox's Pyramid Model lies in its simple visual design and its ability to re-establish a sense of the whole in a complex issue: serving the educational needs of gifted children (Cox, Daniel and Boston, 1985). It is a comprehensive answer to the "patchwork quilt" approaches to gifted education. One finding in the Pyramid Model was that best services for gifted students lie in an appropriate mosaic of services. "As a mosaic is built piece by piece, the projec
builds upon current exemplary elements and adds new programs and new ideas” (Gifted Students Insitute, untitled brochure).

Basic to each piece of the mosaic is a commitment to Flexible Pacing. “The conviction that students should move ahead on the basis of mastery may be the single most important concept for educators designing programs for able learners... Content and pacing should match the student’s abilities” (Cox, Danieli and Broun, 1981, p.131). In Flexible Pacing for Able Learners, 1988, p.1, Danieli and Cox state, “We define flexible pacing as any provision that places students at an appropriate instructional level, creating the best possible match between students’ achievement and instruction, that allows them to move forward in the curriculum as they achieve mastery of content and skills.” The variety of methods which, in practice, meet this definition are included in the sample pyramids.

The second key aspect to appropriate programming is making provisions at three distinct levels: enrichment in the regular classroom, special classes or special schools.

As valuable as the pyramid model is in bringing together appropriate curriculum for gifted students, it is not yet useful as a flexible hands-on planning instrument. The following steps are designed to address this need. In the Post-it Planning Pyramid which follows, the Post-its are the pieces of the mosaic, the completed plan, a picture of services for a child or region.

MATERIALS

Materials needed to construct the planning instrument are a manila folder and a packet of small Post-it Notes™. Draw the pyramid on the inside of the folder as shown or draw it on A3 paper and staple to the folder after copying.

Figure 2 - Model in Folder

A completed plan can be copied for distribution and filing. Changes may be made on the Post-it Notes™ without redoing the entire plan and then recorded by copying. Date each copy of the pyramid so indicate when the plan has been updated or changed.

The folder may be labelled and used to file related material for school or regional-level planning or for the individual child. Assessment information can also be included on either side of the triangle.

SETTING UP THE FOLDER

In deciding how to label the sections of the pyramid, refer to the following diagrams which show the original Pyramid Model (Cox and Danieli, 1985) and the suggested Australian adaptation.

Cox & Danieli Model

Options outside of School

Options within the Region

Options within the School

Options within the Regular Classroom

Suggested Australian Adaptation

Figure 3 - Two Small Pyramids
A suggestion for large regions is to add another division in the middle and call it “Options within the school”. Use divisions and labels which suit local needs.

Dotted lines separate the sections of the pyramid because many options may be located in any of the three or four sections. An example would be a Tournament of Minds team which may be formed at the classroom level. A writing festival may begin at the classroom level and proceed to the school, regional, and out-of-region level. Another example is Math Olympiad, a regional math contest. It is listed under “Options within the Region”, but the competition is regional and training for the teams may begin in the classroom. An activity which fits in more than one section may be placed only in the lowest section of the pyramid in which it occurs or in every section that is appropriate.

The following important ideas help unify and direct regional planning choices.

- Appropriate Pacing P-12
- Ongoing Assessment
- Instruction at Instructional Level
- Curriculum Modifications Across Content Areas
- Enrichment Activities

Although this planning instrument allows flexibility and a grasp of the “whole picture”, each piece has its own expectations. It will be necessary to assess the learning needs of each child in order to plan appropriately for the individual.

LABELLING THE POST-ITS

Options to consider, by no means all-inclusive, are in figure 4.

Figure 4 - Pyramid with Options