



# First Person: PATRICE

## One Size Does Not Fit All

How might a classroom involved in the inclusion of gifted students look? Please take a glimpse into my Primary 1 (kindergarten) classroom, Room 21, for a moment, for inclusion is what you will see.

All of the children are working in math centers. Brandy and Alison are using random number generators (dice) to create simple addition sentences. Once they have generated two numbers to write down, they add the numbers together for the sum, and as all good mathematicians do, they double-check their work. At the same time, Lane and Shelby are busy using the random number generators to do double-digit addition. They squeal when they realize that their sum actually took them above 100. Sam and Megan are well above the regular addition process. They have stepped into the world of multiplication. They are using the random number generators and teddy bear counters to create groups representing multiplication. The entire room is a buzz of mathematical vocabulary and a celebration of learning—music to any teacher's ears. My journey to inclusion of the gifted student within my classroom was a result of realizing that I was not meeting the needs of my students.

As a seventeen-year teaching veteran, I have taught Grades K–6. Throughout those years, I have worn many hats. For a two-year period, I was the curriculum coordinator for our building. I had the pleasant task of formally assessing students as a part of a verification process of our primary talent pool process. Bright-eyed primary students sat eagerly across from me, amazing me with their high-ability thought processes. Each time a tiny student answered a question that was well above the typical/average level of learning for a primary student, I always asked, “Where did you learn about multiplication/square root/such difficult words to read?” The response was *always* the same: “My mom” or “My dad.” I was saddened to never hear, “My teacher.” When I returned to the classroom, I became determined to be in on the fun of removing the ceiling of learning for my students. When one of my students amazes everyone by sharing something brilliant, I am hoping she or he will be able to share, “My teacher taught me that!”

As our children walk through the door of our classrooms, we must ever be cognizant of the fact that “one size does not fit all.” Every classroom, without exception, is a classroom of diverse learners. Through a variety of means, teachers have the ability to orchestrate a classroom so that all needs can and

will be met. The most important information a teacher must know before reaching all children includes what *each* of the children knows, what they need to know, how they are able to apply what they have learned, and what kind of connection each child has made to his or her own world.

Before every thematic unit in our kindergarten classroom, the children help prepare a KWL (sometimes a KWHL) chart. *K* stands for “What do we *know*, or think we *know*, about this subject?” The *W* represents “What do we *want to know* about this subject?” And the *L* is a follow-up for “What have we *learned* about this subject?” We also have a category for *H*, “How will we find out what we want to know?” The KWL chart is a good way for me to get a pulse of the class's knowledge and interest concerning the content I plan to present. I am able to use the information from the children to divide them into interest groups or to determine if the content needs to be modified in any way for particular students. The KWL chart is simply one form of preassessment used in our classroom on a regular basis. As the teacher, I simply must know *what* my children know. If a student or group of students is already equipped with the information I want to teach and I “plow ahead” with that unit without adjustments, then I have committed a grave injustice to my students. I have asked them to be patient as I teach the other students. As adults, we are outraged when we are asked to sit still and listen to something we already know forward and backward. Our children are the same. When we teach content that a child has mastered, we are asking her or him to run in one spot over and over, much like a cartoon character that never seems to get anywhere.

Children not only come to us at different levels; they learn at different paces. Once you know what the children know individually, you must monitor progress through formative assessments. If a child has mastered a concept, he or she should be able to move on. If a child knows how to do simple addition with 100 percent accuracy, he or she should not be put through the nightmarish experience of extra work in simple addition. That child is ready to move on, not run in place! Math is one area in which I enjoy using the compacting process. For that quick learner, once I find out where he or she is, we move forward. The result of the pretesting is a learning atmosphere such as I described earlier. The overall assessment process is simply described. The pretest is the map for instruction. The formative tests are