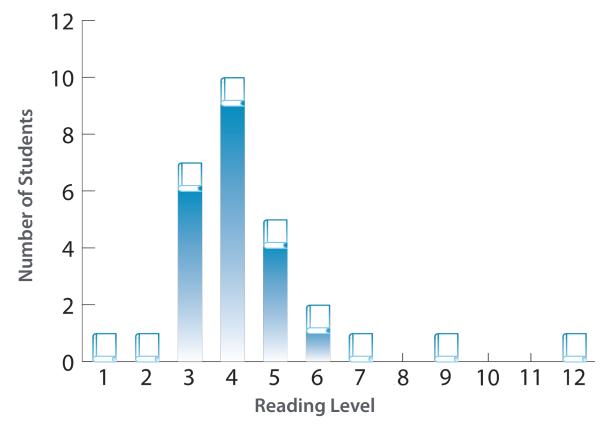


Same Age Does Not Mean Same Learning Needs

Students who are the same age do not always have the same learning needs. For example, as shown in the figure below, students in the typical fourth grade classroom can range from first- to twelfth-grade reading level.



As you can see in the figure, most of the fourth grade students perform near the fourth grade reading level. However, a great many have reading achievement well above (or well below) the fourth grade reading level. This means that their learning needs are quite different from the standard fourth grade curriculum, as well as from their fourth grade peers.

Some argue that academically talented students don't "need" services and can be challenged within the regular classroom. However, there is no evidence that most teachers can effectively teach twelve reading levels simultaneously without substantial support and training. This is not a criticism of teachers—juggling twelve sets of learning needs at one time is quite a task! Even common techniques, like forming small groups, put students performing three or more grade levels apart in the same group.

Take Action

One effective way of matching learning environment with learning needs is academic acceleration. Acceleration comes in many forms, such as: subject-specific acceleration (e.g., having a fourth grade student go to the sixth grade class for reading), curriculum compacting (e.g., going through an entire year's worth of curriculum in one semester), and even grade skipping. The appropriate form of acceleration depends on an individual student's needs and situation.