

Vignette 2: Caroline and Craig

Caroline

Caroline is a gifted seventh grader who has access to challenging mathematics in both her gifted pull-out program and in her mathematics class. Caroline participates in the pull-out program two days a week with other gifted students. Thus, she and the other students are with their teacher only three days a week. However, her teacher recognizes the importance of differentiating instruction for her students every day. She realizes that she must give careful consideration to this instruction because gifted children require different and more flexible educational experiences. As a result, Caroline's teacher provides thought-provoking problems and structures them in ways that provide multiple entry points for the whole class. She also encourages her students to demonstrate what they know during small-group and whole-group discussions, creating a safe and respectful environment where all students can solve problems in different ways. This classroom environment makes Caroline truly enjoy her mathematics class because she feels respected, engaged, challenged, and creative. All these elements will allow her to excel in mathematics.

Craig

Craig, a gifted seventh- grade middle school student, is not engaged during his mathematics lessons. The content is not difficult for Craig, and his participation is not encouraged. For example, his teacher often says, "Craig, I know you know the answer. I want to see if anyone else knows." This statement and similar comments have taught Craig not to raise his hand in class. In addition, his teacher frequently tells him that he cannot use his mathematics knowledge to reach an answer because some of the other students have not yet learned it. For example, when his class was studying circles, Craig was told not to use pi or his algebra skills to calculate area and circumference. This and similar situations have frustrated Craig. As a result, he has learned not to initiate questions or alternative approaches to solving problems. Later, during the school year, Craig approached his teacher to request some challenging problems to work on independently during class. Although the teacher took additional time to find mathematics problems that would challenge Craig, he asked that Craig solve them outside of class. This gesture helped challenge Craig but did not improve his classroom experience. Craig disliked his middle school mathematics class because he felt that he was not respected, engaged, or challenged. He was also prohibited from solving problems using different methods than those used by his peers. Craig's role in his mathematics class- room had been reduced to observing or tutoring his classmates, rather than learning.

Reference: Chval, K. B. & Davis, J. A. (2008). *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*, 14(5), 267-274.