

Gifted and Talented (GATE) Clustering, Enhanced Pull-out Model

This is a nationally researched based gifted and talented model. Under this model GATE identified students are clustered with a teacher trained in gifted methods. Not all students in the classroom are identified as gifted, but all students have access to gifted education strategies. Gifted students participating in the clustering model also receive pull-out services. Cluster sites have a GATE teacher for two days a week instead of one. This gives an increased time frame of 3.5 hours of concentrated time. During this time, students will work with peers on literacy, problem-solving, and independent learning projects.

Q: What does cluster grouping mean?

A: A group of identified gifted students are clustered in a mixed-ability classroom. The teacher has had training in how to teach exceptionally capable students. High-average students are then placed into classrooms without the gifted clusters to balance out the classes in every grade.

Q: Isn't cluster grouping the same as tracking?

A: No. In a tracking system, all students are grouped by ability, and students tend to remain in the same track throughout their school experience. In a tracking system, different curriculum is assigned to the different "tracks". When cluster grouping, all classrooms focus on grade level standards, making extensions and acceleration available to students who have already mastered grade level standards. Gifted students benefit from learning together, and need to be placed with similar students in their areas of strength (Hoover, Saylor, & Feldhusen, 1993;; Kulik & Kulik, 1990;; Rogers, 1993). Cluster grouping of gifted students allows them to learn together, while avoiding permanent grouping arrangements for students of other ability levels.

Q: Why should gifted students be placed in a cluster group instead of being assigned evenly to all classes?

A: When teachers try to meet the diverse learning needs of all students, it becomes extremely difficult to provide adequately for everyone. Often, the highest ability students are expected to "make it on their own". When a teacher has several gifted students, taking the time to make appropriate provisions for them seems more realistic. Furthermore, gifted students can better understand and accept their learning difference if there are others just like them in the class. Finally, scheduling out-of-class activities is easier when the resource teacher has only one cluster teacher's schedule with which to work.

Q: What are the learning needs of gifted students?

A: Since these students have previously mastered many of the concepts they are expected to "learn" in a given class, a huge part of their school time may be wasted. They need exactly what all other students need: consistent opportunity to learn new material and to develop the behaviors that allow them to cope with the challenge and struggle of new learning. It is very difficult for such students to have those needs met in heterogeneous classes.

Q: Won't the creation of a cluster group rob the other classes of academic leadership?

A: Research on role modeling (Schunk, 1987) indicates that to be effective, role models cannot be drastically discrepant in ability from those who would be

motivated by them. When gifted students are grouped in a clustered classroom, they have the benefit of working with one another and new leadership emerges in the other non-cluster classes. The classes without clusters of gifted students include several highly capable students. Teachers, parents and administrators can expect measurable achievement gains across all classes.

Q: Won't the presence of clustered gifted students inhibit the performance of the other students in that class, having a negative effect on their achievement?

A: When the cluster group is kept to a manageable size, many cluster teachers report that there is general improvement in achievement for the entire class. This suggests the exciting possibility that when teachers learn how to provide what gifted students need, they also learn to offer modified versions of the same opportunities to the entire class, thus raising the level of learning for all students, including those who are gifted. The positive effects of the cluster grouping practice may be shared with all students over several years by rotating the cluster teacher assignment among teachers who have had gifted education training and by rotating the other students so all students eventually have a chance to be in the same class with a cluster group.

Q: What specific skills are needed by cluster teachers?

A: Since gifted students are as far removed from the "norm" as are students with significant learning difficulties, it is necessary for teachers to have special training in how to teach children of exceptionally high ability. Cluster teachers should know how to:

- *recognize and nurture behaviors usually demonstrated by gifted students;
- *create a learning environment in which all students will be stretched to learn;
- *allow students to demonstrate and get credit for previous mastery of concepts;
- *provide opportunities for faster pacing of new material;
- *incorporate students' passionate interests into their independent studies;
- *facilitate sophisticated research investigations;
- *provide flexible grouping opportunities for the entire class.

Q: What are the advantages of cluster grouping?

A: Gifted students feel more comfortable when there are other students just like them in the class. They are more likely to choose more challenging tasks when other students will also be eligible. Teachers no longer have to deal with the strain of trying to meet the needs of just one precocious student in a class. Teachers are also much more likely to provide appropriate learning opportunities if more than one student will benefit. The school is able to provide a full-time, cost-effective program for gifted students, since their learning needs are being met every day. In the classes without the gifted clusters, high ability students find new opportunities to become class leaders. Teachers can more easily meet the needs of all students when the ability range in the classroom is narrowed.

Thank you to Hudlow Elementary for posting this document on their website.