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Part IV: Program Development Reflection

April 2013

The impact of acceleration, enrichment, grouping, and advisement on the achievement of gifted students is crucial to their success.

Although this is my tenth year teaching high school English, and for several years, I have taught honors and/or AP courses, I learned through the endorsement program to take my lessons to the next level. For instance, a student in my first period 9<sup>th</sup> grade honors literature course always finishes every task early. She is highly gifted. Before crafting lessons for the endorsement portfolio, I realize I was doing her a disservice. One day we were taking a *Great Expectations* quiz. After the quiz, students picked up an EOCT review activity to complete. I noticed this pupil had finished both tasks and promptly pulled out her math homework. It really never bothered me because *I* was that same student in high school. However, when my administrator pointed it out during her observation the same day, I really began reflecting. For this student in particular, enrichment activities are essential to extend learning and further hone skills and inquiry regarding language arts. This keeps students focused on the subject matter during the class period and challenges them as scholars. From now on, I plan on using the Fulton County TAG lesson plan template to craft all my lessons for all class levels (i.e. honors, on-level, etc.). Even in my 11<sup>th</sup> grade on-level American lit course, there are kids at all learning levels—ESOL, gifted, etc. Providing enrichment activities allows for differentiation of students' who's abilities are at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Similarly, I see the immense need for accelerated courses, seminars, and internships for gifted scholars. After attending the advocacy panel meeting at Sandy Springs Middle School on April 25<sup>th</sup>, I everything clicked for me. Fulton County has a progressive, rigorous gifted program. With the HOPE Scholarship increasing the difficulty to enter state colleges, gifted students and their parents are very aware that often five or six AP courses are needed to be considered for admission. The TAG Advocacy Panel noted that directed studies and internships in the gifted program can look just as competitive to those universities as rigorous APs. In fiscally tight times, programs like gifted education may receive “the ax”. This really resonated with me as I grew up in Southern California and my school did not have a TAG program. I was often board in my classes and could have used further enrichment, like the student I mentioned in the prior paragraph. Cutting gifted education would take key opportunities away from these students not just now but for the long haul. These tough times make it imperative we are advocates to administrators for these students. Buck Greene, principal at Johns Creek High School, referenced us to NAGC.org. This resource is full of videos and information that can help groups advocated for TAG. A colleague of mine has a student who is doing a directed study with him on feminism. She is highly interested in the subject matter and desires to attend Agnes Scott College. If programs like this were cut, this student could not explore a topic more that she is truly interested in prior to specific college courses. Directed studies and internships allow students to focus on their interests and gain real world learning opportunities.

With the implementation of Common Core, grouping is a term heard frequently in department meetings and Professional Learning Communities. From these endorsement courses, I am more cognizant of differentiated learning and flexible grouping. For instance,

I use literature circles often as a discussion activity. In the past, I have let students choose their own groups. Now, I place some strong students with some struggling students in the same group. I give them differentiated lit circle roles (i.e. summarizer, vocab finder, lit device guru, passage master, etc.). This allows me to play up on a student's strength or challenge the student that needs the extra push. It also allows me to give particular tasks to a struggling student that still allow him/her to participate while completing the task at their level. In addition, the varied grouping allows for accelerated students to be "guides" to struggling students. The peer-to-peer interaction is a great model for reinforcing material in a different forum. Overall, the differentiated groups work more efficiently and cohesively.

Groups like Fulton County Supporters of the Gifted are vital in advising gifted students, teachers and parents. As I garnered from the panel meeting, this advisement and advocacy is very helpful in low-performing schools. One teacher on the panel shared that at her school—where it is 97% free and reduced lunch—the gifted program is small. One strategy that worked to increase gifted participation is creating learning opportunities for kids that they may not have received in their younger years—going to museums, reading opportunities, field trips—to grant kids that exposure. The FCSG academic camps offered could provide such opportunities for students. As previously mentioned, TAG advisement cannot only point students toward participation in honors and AP course, but also can help them in cultivating a directed study or internship opportunity honed to their interests.

Leaving the panel advocacy meeting, everything came full-circle. I need to continue to strive to customize my instruction to the diverse interests and learners that come through my door. Socratic seminars, differentiated groups, independent projects, etc. are a few items I will use to drive my classroom planning and instruction. I also feel empowered to

advocate for gifted students. I definitely plan on joining FCSG to increase my learning and advocacy skills as well as network with like-minded peers. This will allow me to become aware of other organizations and workshops related to gifted education that I can attend to freshen my toolbox. Finishing the endorsement is just a stepping stone. From here out, I will continue to take steps to improve learning for all students, all the time.