Project RAP (Reaching Academic Potential): The Next Steps

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Goal: Talent Development

# A Success Story by Shannon Helm

I am a kindergarten teacher in a low income school with a high English Language Learner population. In my particular class of 24 students, 1/3 of the students are considered to be limited English speaking students. I began the school year struggling with how to help these students be successful during their first year in school and for many of them, be successful in a new country.

This past summer I was given the opportunity to be a part of the Javits Grant Project Reaching Academic Potential (RAP). I was able to receive training and materials to support identifying underrepresented students for inclusion in the gifted and talented program. As I began to implement the strategies learned, something amazing happened with one of my students.

Elvin is an English Language Learner and was very quiet and shy. He rarely spoke during instruction or class discussions. At times it was near impossible to assess him to determine his ability in the classroom as often he would not attempt any class work. I began implementing the strategies I learned from meeting with my Project RAP cohort and began to see a dramatic change in him. He was able to choose how he could show me his abilities. What worked for other students did not work for Elvin, so by changing instruction for him, he blossomed. He is a very creative thinker, and I am surprised by his work every day. This is a child who most likely would have been labeled as below grade level, had I not received the training and materials through Project RAP. Not only does Elvin love school now but he is one of my brightest students. It is very encouraging to know that with programs like this more students will achieve success in the classroom.
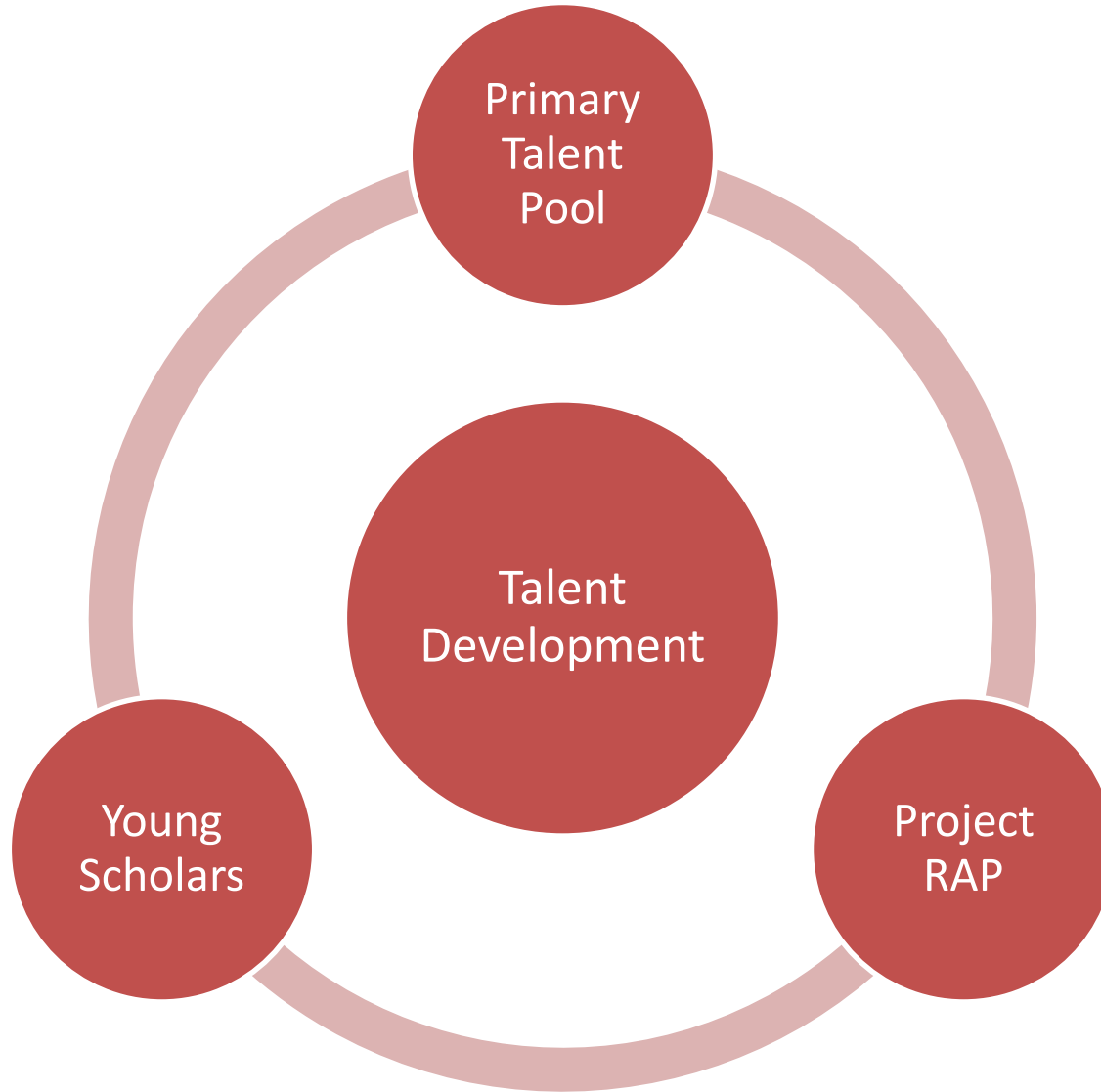
Young Scholars Program

- Research-based practices to increase identification of and effectively nurture historically underrepresented, high-ability students

"Young Scholars are students who are not likely to be considered for gifted programs using current methods of identification and who, without that opportunity, are less likely to pursue advanced learning on their own."

"Historically, these students have lacked access to gifted services, advocates for their high potential, and affirmation of their advanced abilities."

Horn, 2014, p. 48

Role of Principals

The principals of Young Scholars schools are committed to increasing the number of low socioeconomic, minority learners participating in gifted programs at their schools, and they play a key role in the success of the model....These leaders are strong advocates for the students; they provide ongoing support to the teachers, and they ensure that year after year the Young Scholars are placed with teachers who know how to nurture and develop their gifted potential.

Horn, 2014, p. 47

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Cluster Grouping

Victoria Fellows Attendees: What are your thoughts or insights?

Total School Cluster Grouping & Differentiation: A Comprehensive, Research-Based Plan for Raising Student Achievement and Improving Teacher Practices (2nd ed.),
Marcia Gentry

Research-based application of cluster grouping to...

- Provide full-time services to high-achieving elementary students

- Help all students improve their academic achievement and educational self-efficacy

- Help teachers more effectively and efficiently meet the diverse need of their students

- Weave gifted education and talent development "know-how" into the fabric of all educational practices in the school

Research-Based Benefits of cluster grouping

- Gifted students regularly interact with intellectual peers and age-mates
- Full-time services are provided for gifted students without additional costs

- Curricular differentiation is more efficient and likely to occur when a group of high-achieving students is placed with a teacher who has expertise, training, and a desire to differentiate curriculum than when distributed among many teachers.

- Removing the highest achievers from most classrooms allows other achievers to emerge and gain recognition.

- Student achievement increases when cluster grouping is used.

- Over time, fewer students are identified as low achievers and more students are identified as high achievers.

- Cluster grouping reduces the range of student achievement within all classrooms.

What is best practice?

Best Practice: Placement of Students

- All students are grouped into clusters based on their abilities and achievement potential.

- Involve teachers in developing class lists.

- Classrooms should be configured using Gentry's model on pages 28-29, 38-39.

- Cluster students needing special education services in classrooms with resource personnel assistance. Twice-exceptional students should be included in the gifted cluster.

- Use local norms to find the most relatively advanced students who qualify for free/reduced lunch, who are English language learners, who are twice-exceptional, and who represent racial ethnic minority groups.

- The clusters are placed in classrooms so that the learning range within each classroom is narrower than in a typical heterogeneous classroom.

- Conduct a quick assessment of reading and math skills when new students enroll. Place new students tentatively into classrooms until records arrive and student performance can be more fully assessed. Explain to parents that the initial classroom placement is temporary and that a permanent placement will be made within 2 or 3 weeks.

Best Practice: Staffing

- Assign teachers with specialized training on cluster grouping, differentiation, and gifted education to the classroom with the cluster group of RAP students.

- Cluster group teachers must want to teach the cluster.

- Cluster group teachers should continue as the cluster teacher at that grade level for at least three years. (This allows them to hone their craft.)

Best Practice: Classroom Strategies

- Teachers use differentiation methods that vary the content, pace, process, and products for gifted students and for other students who also benefit from these opportunities.

- Ongoing assessment allows teachers to differentiate flexibly and ensures that all students make continuous progress.

Best Practice: Professional Development

- Staff training ensures that teachers learn to recognize gifted behaviors and to differentiate instruction to accommodate the exceptional educational needs of students who can learn at levels beyond grade level expectations.

Best Practice: Administrative Support

- Strong administrative support is essential for effective implementation of cluster grouping.

- Administrators have a key role in communicating the value of cluster grouping in raising student achievement to all staff, parents, and community.

- Administrators should plan for ongoing professional development to build the capacity of teachers to meet the needs of their high ability students.

- Administrators must realize that successful implementation of the cluster grouping model takes time and that it is important to support teachers in this process and keep changes to teaching assignments minimal.

What are the major initiatives going on in your building?

- How does talent development through cluster grouping complement those initiatives?

The Center for Gifted Studies

Kentucky's new accountability system is focused on GROWTH.

What are areas of concern?

Overall

- Commitment to cluster grouping according to best practice
- Consistency in cluster teachers
  - Cluster-group teachers MUST 1) have specialized training on differentiation and gifted education; 2) want to teach the cluster; 3) stay the cluster-teacher for that grade for at least three years (teachers must be allowed to hone their craft).
- Sharing of resources
- Accountability
- Long term planning

Professional Learning

- Administrators
  - Gifted education, best practice cluster grouping, long-term planning
- All teachers
  - Basic training on what RAP is, how to use resources, gifted education
- New cluster group teachers
  - Gifted education, cluster grouping, differentiation, classroom management
- Experienced cluster group teachers
  - Specific strategies, new resources

Communication

- Entire school buy-in including all administration
- Family buy-in
- Scheduled cluster leads meetings (monthly?)
- Scheduled PLCs (once per semester?)

Accountability Tool:
Walk Through Instrument

Next Steps: Planning

- Read assigned pages
  1. Pages 27-34
  2. Pages 35-45
  3. Pages 46-54
  4. Pages 55-62
  5. Pages 62-69

- Note Important Concepts on Appropriate Charts According to Topic
  - Topics:
    - Professional Development Plan
    - Staffing Plan
    - Communication Plan
  - Phrase/Idea and page number

What questions do you have?