

Unit 3, Section 5

The Role of the Co-ordinator: Developing and Managing Provision for the G & T Cohort

Background

This section looks at the co-ordinator's role in managing provision for gifted and talented students, through the development of teaching and learning programmes and in monitoring the progress of individual students. This will involve a critical evaluation of strategies and frameworks already in place. As Eyre (1997) points out: 'in considering provision for the most able it is important that a school looks first at its practice for all students ... Able child provision cannot be bolted on to ineffective practice.'

Key Issues

- The co-ordinator has a responsibility to ensure that students have access to the teaching and learning and extra-curricular programme and receive full benefit from it
- Effective management of provision will require frameworks which are integral to the organisation
- Effective management will use/adapt existing structures, roles and practices within a school, as well as introduce new ones where there is need
- Effective management will involve an understanding of the change process in education and strategies for change.

The role of the co-ordinator

The co-ordinator for gifted and talented students will have the task of adapting and devising organisational approaches and systems, and of leading the development of classroom and extra-curricular provision. In the guidelines for co-ordinators, the DfES makes the point that 'an effective gifted and talented policy will almost certainly require significant changes in the organisation, curriculum and perhaps culture of the school. As a rule of thumb, if the G&T policy is not having this degree of impact, it is probably not working...Schools are encouraged to adopt a range of organisational approaches, developed in response to students' needs and aspirations.'

The G&T co-ordinator therefore has a key leadership and management role to play in the processes of change for school improvement although it is not the role of the co-ordinator to be the sole perpetrator of change.

Curricular Support

Frameworks for the Teaching and Learning Programme

Gifted and Talented co-ordinators can be regarded as the experts on the needs of the cohort and their expertise can be drawn upon when the curriculum is designed. Areas for consultation and review might include student grouping, acceleration, courses on offer, and structuring choices to influence course selection. The co-ordinator will also be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the success of such organisational changes.

Co-ordinators for gifted and talented students will play a central role in the professional development of colleagues. They will need to work with departments to identify staff development needs and to work with the school's professional development co-ordinator to plan staff training, whether in-house, via external agencies, or both. Clark and Callow [1998] define a school with effective provision as one which involves the majority of members of staff in professional development and programme design, regarding the needs of the able. They place strong emphasis on the need for the co-ordinators themselves to have reflected on issues relating to the education of gifted and talented children. Clark and Callow also stress the need for initial in-service training in order to allow teachers to explore their values and beliefs regarding gifted and talented students. Introducing colleagues to current thinking and debate about such students provides a forum in which anxieties and reservations can be aired, and misconceptions addressed. American research demonstrates the importance of specific training for teaching able students. Shore, Cornell, Robinson & Ward (1991) find that 'such training had a marked effect on success in identification ... that trained teachers tend to be more supportive of able pupils, and that teachers without special training have been apathetic and even hostile'.

At department level, the co-ordinator will need to work closely with subject leaders or their nominees to develop practices within the classroom. She or he may support such initiatives as changes to grouping; enrichment activities; teaching thinking skills; liaison with departments in other cluster schools; and use of support staff and mentors.

As schools and departments take on board the requirements of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy, co-ordinators can highlight planning for the gifted and talented through the National Strategy subject audit process, and as schemes of work are being reviewed. National Strategy Consultants have a significant role in supporting subject areas, and co-ordinators could exploit opportunities for joint planning with them, particularly as national strategy training materials are now available for teaching able pupils.

Support for individual learners

As subject areas begin to address provision for the gifted and talented cohort, the co-ordinator will need to consider ways in which she or he will identify and monitor good practice, and how best to ensure it is regularly disseminated. Clark and Callow (1998) suggest a model of curricular writing groups for developing provision within secondary schools, with a clear brief for evaluation, revision and dissemination built into the guidelines. The model recommended by the DfES is one in which a network of nominated teachers meet regularly to discuss provision and development, and disseminate information and models of good practice to their subject or year teams.

Beyond the school, the co-ordinators will need to work with cluster partners, including the lead and strand co-ordinators, to disseminate good practice, facilitate liaison within and beyond subject areas, and develop support and training programmes. The DfES website offers a range of examples of current initiatives in clusters.

Formative assessment is central to auditing and meeting the needs of individual learners. The responsibility of the co-ordinator here is not to conduct such assessment themselves, but to have oversight of the development and management of effective assessment frameworks. Areas for consideration include:

- How well subject areas are identifying the learning needs of the individual
- What strategies exist at departmental level for the meeting of such needs
- How review and evaluation are built into the assessment framework
- Whether the audit reveals a need for an institutional response to a particular range of needs e.g. language /literacy skills; access to ICT.

In the context of a subject or a department, good systems for monitoring the progress of individual students are the key to effective support. In supporting the individual learner, the class teacher will assess and meet learning needs through:

- Regular target setting and review, in which successes and difficulties are addressed
- Making clear to pupils the criteria for success, and learning strategies through which success may be achieved

Here too the introduction of the National Strategy may facilitate change. Co-ordinators could discuss with departments those strategy objectives that may be most appropriate for groups and individuals in the Gifted and Talented cohort. These can then be incorporated into medium and short-term teaching plans, and used for individual target setting. The National Strategy will also enable co-ordinators and teachers to track students' progress through Key Stage 2 – 3 transition, through the clear progression of objectives from the primary to the secondary phase.

The performance of gifted and talented students should appear regularly on the agenda of departmental meetings, enabling the Head of Department to:

- Track the progress of students
- Set departmental targets for the cohort
- Develop teaching and learning to meet the needs of the cohort
- Ensure that departmental policies on homework, assessment, examination entry etc. address the needs of the cohort
- Review the cohort itself
- And also, importantly, to intervene where a need is perceived.

Some schools record the process using Individual Education Plans such as are used by SEN departments. Leyden (1998) identifies role of IEPs in raising awareness of the needs and progress of individuals, suggesting that they 'have acted as a catalyst for planning and reviewing the school's arrangements, and for ensuring that there is a coherent approach' [67]. The use of IEPs will facilitate monitoring and evaluation, as well as providing for individual needs, enabling the co-ordinator to:

- Track the progress of individual students
- Set whole-school targets for the cohort
- Perceive and respond to patterns of underachievement or other individual needs
- Ensure that all those with responsibility have access to data
- Identify areas where provision is not meeting needs.

The range of support needs for individual gifted pupils will be as diverse as those for any other group, and the register will include the vulnerable and the disaffected as well as their more confident peers. Gifted and talented pupils may, in addition, have specific support needs about which co-ordinators may be regarded as an expert. It should be emphasised here that the co-ordinator's role lies in managing provision in this area, rather than seeking to undertake such provision themselves.

Pastoral Support Frameworks

Co-ordinators may wish to consider the role of the tutor in meeting individual needs. Where the role of the class teacher and head of department is to identify and provide for the learning needs of students within their subject area, staff with pastoral responsibility will have an overview of several areas. They will be aware of circumstances that may require support and will alert colleagues to problems. Where systems of 'academic tutoring' are in place, the tutor's role becomes central to reviewing and discussing progress with students and parents, and to passing on concerns and queries to heads of department.

Such factors demonstrate the importance of communication between teachers, tutors and co-ordinators. There is also the probability that teachers' identification of able underachievers will be more stable and accurate when the student is seen working across a range of curriculum areas [Painter 1982]. In their responsibility for such communication, the co-ordinator's role resembles that of the SENCO; systems may exist in the Special needs department which could be usefully adapted.

Tutors and year heads can also play an important role in encouraging, recording and monitoring the take-up of extra-curricular and 'enhancement' activities. Involving tutors in discussion of the programme with students as a part of tutor or PHSE time will give them insight into peer group response and can help identify issues relating to access and motivation – e.g. are there students whose home circumstances make attendance difficult? Are there groups who could be effectively wooed with specially tailored activities? Through discussion with tutors, the co-ordinator will be better placed to assess the suitability of provision and its impact on students.

Extra-curricular activities can be designed to meet pastoral support needs, for example: building motivation and self esteem, study skills and time management. Activities could involve tutors, teachers and learning mentors, and might operate within or beyond the timetable for periods of time dictated by students' need.

Creating a register of the gifted and talented students and developing distinct provision for them are innovative measures in many schools. Co-ordinators will be confronted with some new issues in their communication with parents which might include: how parents are informed about their child's inclusion in the cohort; how to address parental anxieties where a child has not been included, or has been removed; pressure to achieve, or lack of confidence in their ability to support their child's learning needs. Parents of children in the cohort may also express more common anxieties, for example: Particular concerns about specific subjects; anxiety about approaching the school; language/intercultural issues, or the meeting of special needs.

Mentoring

Co-ordinators should consider the appropriateness and benefits for gifted and talented students of a variety of mentoring approaches. It may be the co-ordinator's responsibility to ensure that mentors have some training and understand the role, and to monitor and evaluate the provision for students in the gifted and talented cohort.

The following may exist within the school, or may need developing:

- Mentoring by older students
- Gifted and talented students acting as mentors to other students
- Mentoring with specific relation to under-achievement in a defined group
- Mentoring/tutoring from higher education institutions, particularly with regard to raising aspirations
- Mentoring from local community/businesses for particular career interests, areas of talent, and role models,
- Mentoring by form tutors or key teachers

The provision of learning mentors may be appropriate for some of the gifted and talented cohort, particularly students who have been identified as under-achieving, or who have specific challenges to overcome e.g. attendance.

Co-ordinators and other key colleagues involved in mentoring programmes will find the DfES training programme for Learning Mentors useful. Of particular interest might be the sections on helping pupils identify preferred learning styles and ways of working, the mentor's role; confidentiality; relationship building; counselling skills, and effective use of questions.

As with many aspects of provision for gifted and talented pupils, the co-ordinator's role is to co-ordinate rather than to provide. For example, she or he may find heads of Key Stage 5 willing to set up mentoring by Year 12 and 13 students, and the heads of careers or community liaison may provide contacts for outside mentors. Information about training, successful projects, and external institutions willing to be involved can be shared across cluster schools.

Partnership with Parents

In developing effective communication with parents, G&T co-ordinators will not only be seeking to allay anxieties, but to create fruitful relationships with parents which support the child's development and learning. The key elements of their role will focus on:

- informing parents of their child's place in the cohort and subsequent progress
- helping parents support their child's learning
- acting as liaison between parents and colleagues

Leyden [1998] recognises the importance of partnership, warning that 'Without the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience...both [school and parent] may overlook important factors in the child's development' [79]. Clark and Callow [1998] point out the responsibility of the school to help develop parents' awareness: 'It is only with full understanding of what the school is doing for these children and insight into the issues surrounding their education in the ordinary school setting that parents can function effectively in partnership'. [69] In liaison with parents, the co-ordinator will not be concerned simply with giving information but will look for ways to develop a more collaborative relationship.

The Hargreaves Report [1984] suggests some ways of encouraging a more productive relationship. One example is a home/school council consisting of representative parents and teachers, which could be usefully adapted by co-ordinators. Other measures might include:

- Regular information regarding progress, and the targets that have been set
- Running parents' meetings about, for example, the school's programme for gifted and talented students, or supporting learning at home
- Involving colleagues in a pastoral role who will often have an existing relationship with parents
- Family learning events e.g. family technology days, using the CLC
- Contact before transfer, i.e. liaison work with primary/cluster schools
- Celebrating students' achievements

Customs and systems may well already exist which help the co-ordinator. Schools are committed, at least nominally, to a culture of welcome and access to parents. On the other hand, this may be an area for development in some schools.

Extra-curricular/Study Support

The importance of extra curricular activities in enriching G&T pupils' curricular, social and creative experiences is well documented. {For a useful further reading list, see Joan Freeman, Educating Gifted Children, in *Handbook of Educational Ideas and Practices*: Routledge, London [1990].} Setting up extra-curricular programmes is in many ways the least problematic of the co-ordinator's role in terms of organisation. Where there may be some resistance from colleagues on the grounds of exclusivity, co-ordinators should look first at the school's overall provision. If there is already a range of activities and events catering for a diverse range of needs and interests, it is, 'as legitimate to organise a club or special event ... likely to attract the academically able as it is to establish teams and competitions likely to attract those with sporting prowess.' (Clark & Callow 1998). This is defined as Freeman's 'Sports Model' [1998], in which regular coaching is available to those with other gifts and talents in the same way as it is to those good at sports.

However, for an extra curricular programme to be effective in enhancing learning it needs to do more than provide some experiences outside the classroom. George (1999) maintains that 'to be effective, the enrichment programme has to set objectives, provide for the excitement of learning, and lead to more advanced thinking'. The co-ordinator may well find that a cohesive approach to planning in this way for out-of hours learning is an immediate area for development. In the pack *Extending Opportunity* - a national framework for study support the DfES states that:

Where study support is seen as central to helping pupils learn and succeed, teachers take an interest in their pupils' activities and achievements out of school hours. This allows pupils' successes through study support to be recognised and celebrated. Equally importantly, teachers have a fuller and more rounded understanding of what their pupils are capable of, what they enjoy and how they might be further encouraged and supported

To harness the support of colleagues as well as pupils it is vital that extra curricular and enhancement programmes are not viewed as a bolt on activities but as a core part of the school's provision. It is therefore recommended that they:

- feature in the school development plan, prospectus and annual report
- are discussed in governors' and senior management team meetings
- are the responsibility of a designated member of the senior management team and middle managers

Other initiatives should be considered as potential parts of the package. Aimhigher may provide funding and opportunities for access to higher education institutions. The brief for City Learning Centres states that these should provide additional out-of-hours learning opportunities; family learning opportunities, and ICT-based networking which might include distance learning, study support and links to university-based mentors. Making the most of these opportunities will involve liaison and planning with the CLC and ICT departments.

To ensure the success of the enhancement and enrichment programme, co-ordinators must make certain that:

- The programme reflects the diverse interests and needs of pupils
- The take-up reflects the nature of the cohort
- Involvement and achievement is recorded
- The quality of provision is high

Advocacy

The G&T co-ordinator should act as 'the 'champion' of able students by creating positive attitudes towards them, and seeing that these are sustained. Creating a system which will specifically reward and encourage the gifted and talented cohort is a sensitive activity and may well provoke accusations of elitism. Here, it is important to remember that while reward systems can be central to creating a climate of achievement, this will only come about when all involved in the institution have an investment in its central processes. Any fully equitable rewards system in a school must rest on effective differentiation in the classroom and the understanding of individual learning needs. The rewarding of the most able cannot be perceived as elitist where all students are engaged in learning processes, are aware of their learning targets, and are rewarded for achieving those targets. There are few schools, if any, which rely entirely on grades and examination results to motivate students. Co-ordinators may find a useful approach to be that of examining existing reward systems to see how effective they are with specific reference to the cohort. Features to look for might include:

Culture/ethos

- Are the criteria for rewards fully understood by all?
- Do any groups of students seem to receive rewards more or less often than others, especially for reasons outside the criteria?
- Nomination - is this equitable across departments and classes?
- Are the rewards themselves and their method of delivery suitable for students, e.g. the preference of some boys for discreet rewards?
- Are there separate systems for particular students already in place e.g. for poor attenders, or students on behaviour programmes?

If a successful system is to be achieved, a sense of ownership and participation will be central. The co-ordinator should ensure that all those that work with students, including mentors, support staff and those involved in delivering the extra-curricular programme, are involved in the nomination process. Peer nomination may also be an issue to be considered.

Managing Change

It is clear that the co-ordinator's role in developing and managing provision for G&T pupils means leading and managing change, whether in systems, beliefs, behaviour or teaching and learning practices. Understanding features of the change process; recognising success factors in implementation and developing a strategic approach to planning will assist in bringing about the improvements needed in Gifted and Talented provision.

Activity 3.5

Activity

- Within your school, identify frameworks & systems already in place which support gifted and talented students. How might they be adapted to do so more effectively?
- Identify areas where a framework for support is lacking. e.g. use of data. Consider what could be introduced and how. Identify key players in putting this into practice. Discuss this with your senior management team.

Learning Outcomes

- Gain understanding of whole school frameworks which support the academic and pastoral needs of the cohort
- Understand the management role of the co-ordinator in ensuring that the needs of students within the cohort are met
- Recognise the role of the co-ordinator in developing and disseminating understanding of the needs of the Gifted and Talented students, and acting as their advocate
- Recognise the role of the co-ordinator in managing change

References

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- Goodlad, S. and Hirst, B.[1989]** *Peer Tutoring -A Guide to Learning by Teaching*. London: Kogan Page
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Additional Readings

- DfEE (1999)** *Extending Opportunity*
- Fullan, M. (2001)** *The new meaning of Educational Change* (3rd Edition) New York : Teachers College Press
- Montgomery, D. (1996)** *Educating the Able* London: Cassell
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- Welding, J. (1998)** Able Children in a Comprehensive School, *Educating Able Children/* NACE Spring 1998 Issue 2, 3-10 [see course library]

Websites

- DfES Standards and Effectiveness Unit:**
<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk> (Roles and responsibilities of lead and school co-ordinators in Excellence in Cities schools)

