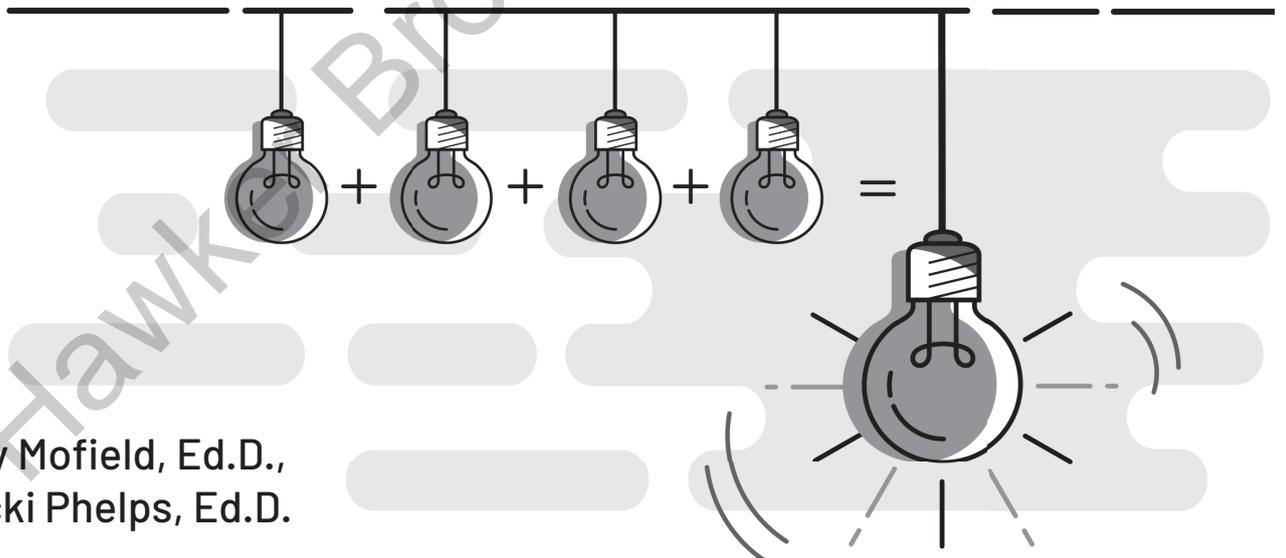


# Collaboration, Coteaching, and Coaching in Gifted Education

*Sharing Strategies to  
Support Gifted Learners*



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# Introduction

This book provides guidance for facilitating productive collaboration within and outside the school for gifted education teachers, specialists, coordinators, coaches, and those in related roles. In the context of educating students with gifts and talents, there are a number of opportunities for collaboration, including:

- + coplanning lessons for differentiation in the regular education classroom,
- + coteaching to provide appropriate levels of challenge for a variety of learners,
- + instructional coaching to activate potential in teachers working with gifted learners,
- + collaborative consultation with a team of educators and professionals to provide specialized supports, and
- + partnering with parents, the community, and outside school agencies to support talent development of students with high potential.

In the context of schools, gifted students often receive most of their instruction in regular education settings, so educators must consider the value of collaboration as an effort to build capacity in teachers' competencies for differentiation. Collaboration through coplanning, coteaching, and instructional coaching with a gifted education teacher or specialist can be an efficient way to build classroom teachers' skills in identifying and challenging gifted learners, ultimately transferring to increased outcomes for student learning. Additionally, through collaboration,



gifted education teachers can learn more about academic content used in the regular classroom, thereby connecting it more intently to gifted programming (e.g., pull-out services).

With capacity building as a major goal, we view collaboration as a vehicle for professional learning in the field of gifted education. Best practices in professional learning include models that promote sustained, collaborative, goal-aligned, and transferable active learning (Novak, 2018). Along these lines, collaborative teaching practices and instructional coaching also provide opportunities for reflection, regular follow-up, and positive impact on teacher practices and student learning, as outlined by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) 2019 Gifted Programming Standards (see 6.4.2).

In many school districts, gifted students are served through push-in contexts, in which the gifted education teacher provides instruction within a regular classroom, often in addition to a pull-out setting. Based on our experiences and research on related collaborative teaching models, this book provides a structure for how teachers (gifted education and regular education teachers) can practically approach instructional planning and lesson implementation together, as thinking partners with a shared responsibility for student learning. If teachers are simply tasked with working together without time to thoughtfully plan and reflect, or receive adequate training on the vision, roles, and expectations, this will likely result only in superficial support for students, not meaningful learning. Collaboration can be powerful and rewarding for both students and teachers when defined structures—such as clear protocols, roles and responsibilities, and models for how teachers can navigate collaboration—are in place. Overall, this is the aim of the book, to provide guidance for developing such structures.

## Organization of the Book

Chapter 1 defines *collaboration* as an umbrella term and defines various collaborative practices (e.g., coteaching, coaching, collaborative consultation). Collaboration models are presented along a spectrum from simply sharing resources to “colaboring” with others. We present the Collaborative Process Model as a planning guide for all types of collaboration in the book. This model is framed around TEAM (trust, engage, align, maintain), the guiding principles that support sustained, positive, productive collaboration.

Chapter 2 situates collaboration within the context of systemic change. For those at the beginning stages of collaborative teaching, this chapter defines roles and practices, discusses barriers to productive collaboration and how to problem solve through them, provides recommendations for building systems of support for



collaboration, and shares lessons learned from recent research (Mofield, 2020b) on teachers' perceptions of benefits and barriers to collaboration.

Chapter 3 delves into the building blocks of coplanning for differentiated instruction. Vertical differentiation is introduced as a way to challenge gifted learners by adding open inquiry, depth, complexity, critical thinking, creative thinking, higher order thinking, abstract thinking, and boundaries to tasks and assignments. We also provide ideas for differentiating assessments and a guide for independent study projects.

Chapter 4 provides the “how” of coplanning. Suggestions are provided for sharing responsibilities, using virtual planning space, and planning long-term units. We also provide a protocol for demonstration teaching (e.g., a gifted education teacher modeling a strategy or portion of a lesson), which allows for reflection on how instructional approaches impact gifted students' learning.

Chapter 5 outlines the adaptation of Friend and Cook's (2017) classic models of coteaching for gifted education. Although the traditional coteaching models are often used to meet the needs of English language learners (ELLs) or students with special needs to enable access to the general curriculum, the adapted models facilitate enrichment or extension to the general curriculum for students who have already mastered the content or need additional challenge.

Chapters 6 and 7 provide summaries and examples of how specific instructional strategies can be used to design lessons with planned “vertical” differentiation. Many of these strategies are tried and true to gifted education, but in these chapters we present them in contexts of working with a classroom teacher through coplanning and coteaching. The strategies in Chapter 6 include overviews of critical and creative thinking process models that can easily be incorporated with content to “tier” a lesson or create a differentiated learning task, and the models in Chapter 7 involve more integrated approaches to the overall lesson design, leading students to deep conceptual understanding.

Chapter 8 introduces instructional coaching in the context of gifted education. We apply the Collaborative Process Model to coaching in order to facilitate effective communication and self-reflection. Instructional coaching activates potential in teachers as they strive to improve their practices around serving and teaching gifted students.

Chapter 9 details a method for collaborative consultation in which the gifted education teacher or specialist works with a team to develop plans to address special needs of gifted learners, particularly twice-exceptionalities, underachievement, and social-emotional concerns. Chapter 10 also provides an overview of specific considerations and supports that can be shared with others pertaining to identifying and serving diverse populations of gifted learners, especially those from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse backgrounds.



We close in Chapter 11 by expanding the scope of collaboration beyond the walls of the school. We share ideas for promoting parent engagement, using community resources to supplement and enrich academic content, leveraging mentorships to engage students with experts within a specific domain, and partnering with advocacy groups in ways to support gifted education. Through the lens of talent development, we discuss how collaborating with outside agencies and special university programs allows students to learn how experts approach their work in authentic ways, guiding their pursuits of similar paths.

### Research Support

What is known about the effects of collaborative teaching as it relates to teaching students with gifts and talents? This is a broad question, and to answer it means considering if the context is coplanning, coteaching, team collaboration, or coaching, as well as the model of service being used (e.g., whether students are in cluster groups in the regular education classroom, or whether the push-in model is used as a supplement to a pull-out model).

Most of what is known about a consultative approach in gifted education is limited to work from the early 2000s, other than a few studies on teachers' perceptions and small case studies. Positive effects have been noted from Landrum (2001), who found that regular education teachers improved their skills in differentiating instruction when a consultative model was used with 10 elementary schools. Known as the catalyst model, the gifted education specialists collaborated with classroom teachers through models like push-in while also providing direct services. Additionally, Masso (2004) found positive effects from coteaching on gifted students' interests and engagement. Few studies in gifted education contexts have examined the effect of coteaching on student achievement. In one report by Wake County Public School System (Lenard & Townsend, 2017), students who were cotaught in science outperformed those who were not cotaught, but these results were not the same for cotaught math and reading classes. Much of the research indicates that administrative support, time for coplanning, and appropriate training on collaborative models are important factors for facilitating effective coteaching. We should note the substantive research on the effectiveness of using cluster grouping of gifted students within regular education classrooms (e.g., Brulles et al., 2012). In this context, there are great possibilities for collaborative teaching in reaching a wide range of learners and making differentiation more manageable for the classroom teacher.

Beyond increasing the classroom teacher's competencies in differentiating, benefits to student learning and engagement are consistently noted in the literature (Landrum, 2001; Lenard & Townsend, 2017; Masso, 2004; Mofield, 2020b). Many of



the suggestions in this book are based on findings from Mofield (2020b) revealing teachers' perceived barriers and benefits to collaborative teaching. Using this recent study and recommendations from the coteaching research, we detail the suggestions for effective collaboration (e.g., sufficient planning time, systemic supports, working with volunteers, etc.) in the chapters that follow.

## A Starting Point for a Journey

Many of the structures and strategies provided in this book are based on our own successes and challenges of leading teachers in multiple districts and schools (both private and public) through implementing a push-in model as part of a continuum of gifted services. We certainly encountered obstacles along the way but learned many lessons that we are now sharing with you. This book is a user-friendly resource for gifted education teachers and specialists who need practical ideas for making collaboration a meaningful pursuit beyond “being polite and nice” to each other. We hope that you find many of these models and strategies useful, but we also acknowledge you may need to adjust many of these approaches for your specific context. Whether your gifted program adopts an advanced academics approach using Response to Intervention (RtI), a talent development model focused on shaping talent in specific domains, or a model of differentiating content, process, and products as a way to meet the needs of gifted students, the strategies provided in this book can be applied in a variety of contexts aimed to challenge gifted students.

While reading this book, keep in mind that we work from the assumption that all teachers want to help students learn, grow, and develop their potential. We also acknowledge that few teachers have specialized training to address the needs of gifted students (Hertberg-Davis, 2009) and need support in differentiating for the range of abilities and readiness levels among their students. Establishing trust necessary for successful collaboration hinges on relationships and starts with presuming positive intent with collaborative partners (Perkins, 2003). Approaching collaborative work with curiosity, a willingness to grow and learn, and committed spirit to the endeavor will create contexts for success.

This resource may serve only as a starting point on a journey toward productive collaboration. We encourage you to continually grow in your personal efforts in learning more about collaboration and specific models associated with it. Seek out resources, talk to others who have used collaboration successfully, ask questions, and evaluate what is and isn't working. Keep going and keep growing! We encourage you to stay true to the purpose for which collaboration in this context is aimed—to support others in supporting students to understand, show, and grow their gifts and talents.