

PLC/Book Study Guide for *The Power of Self-Advocacy for Gifted Learners*

Deb Douglas

This guide is designed as a professional development resource and can be used to facilitate a book study or as a learning experience for a professional learning community (PLC). Facilitator notes are provided for additional support and explanation in planning and facilitating your school or group's sessions. I recommend that the principal and/or facilitator read the entire guide and the book before beginning the study.

For each session, participants will be asked to read chapters of the book. They may also be asked to bring materials or create or implement something *prior* to attending a session. Each chapter description includes guiding questions and suggested tasks that can be used as group activities during the group session.

Please note that the preparation work is noted at the beginning for each session. Before you dismiss participants from each session, look ahead to the next chapter and review and clarify what must be done before the next meeting. Reach agreements if suggested tasks are going to be adjusted or modified.

Introduction and Chapter 1: Change and Chance

To be completed before the first session:

- Read the Foreword, Introduction, and Chapter 1.
- List students you currently work with who would most benefit from self-advocacy.

1. What changes have occurred within your district during the past five years that may have affected gifted education?
2. How has your role in gifted education changed during those five years?
3. List and briefly describe specific students you have worked with who fit into each of the six gifted learner profiles:
 - Successful
 - Creative
 - Underground
 - At-Risk
 - 2E
 - Autonomous
4. In what ways do you currently talk with your students and their parents about giftedness?
5. What are some of the obstacles you've experienced in talking with students and parents about giftedness?
6. What new avenues for communication could you initiate?
7. Describe a situation in which you (or one of your students) had a chance encounter that changed your educational path.
8. In what ways can we improve the chances that students in all six profiles are recognized and have their needs addressed?

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9. As a group, list some concerns you'd like to have addressed and questions you hope to have answered about self-advocacy by the end of this book study.

Facilitator Note: *Keep this list handy as you conduct the book study. Keep referring participants back to their questions and concerns to guide group conversation and to encourage individual professional growth.*

Chapter 2:

Basics and Beliefs

To be completed before the Chapter 2 session:

- Read Chapter 2.
- List the advantages and disadvantages of encouraging students to be partners in their own educations.

1. What are the most common frustrations that your gifted students have shared with you or that you have noticed while working with them?
2. How can you best respond to those specific gripes?
3. In what ways are students in your school encouraged to ask for what they need and want?
4. When have you experienced *flow*? (See pages 22–23 for details.)
5. What are some ways we can help students find flow in the classroom?
6. Discuss the educator’s role in providing feedback at each stage of the decision-making process.
7. Study the self-advocacy flowchart on page 36. Describe the inherent educator-student partnership that is required.

Chapter 3: Rights and Responsibilities

To be completed before the Chapter 3 session:

- Read Chapter 3.
- Describe the current atmosphere in your school or district that encourages or discourages self-advocacy of gifted students.

1. Which of the many definitions of giftedness on pages 40–41 appeals most to you? Why?
2. Compare the definitions and list aspects that you feel best describe gifted students.
3. Do you think educators should use the word *gifted*? Why or why not?
4. What laws or statutes in your state or province address the education of gifted students?
5. What words within your district’s mission statement indicate that it includes gifted students?
6. Complete the Attributes Quiz on page 53 with another educator. Discuss your responses. In what ways might myths and stereotypes affect responses?
7. Which approach on page 50 do you most agree with: *national-resource* or *special-education*? Why?

Chapter 4:

Profiles and Preferences

To be completed before the Chapter 4 session:

- Read Chapter 4.
- Assess and describe your own learner profile.

Facilitator Note: *The goal of the pre-session assignment is to allow participants to reflect on their own learner traits. Remind participants throughout the discussion that every person's profile is unique and that there is no such thing as a right or wrong, best or worst, gifted or not gifted profile.*

1. What learner profile assessments for each of the five areas listed on page 56 are already used or available in your district?
 - Cognitive functioning
 - Learning strengths
 - Interests
 - Learning preferences
 - Personality characteristics and traits
2. Who is (or could be) responsible for facilitating each of the assessments in your district?
3. In what ways could you help your students collect this information about themselves?
4. In what ways could you help your students reflect on this information about themselves?
5. In what ways might a teacher's learner profile conflict with her or his students' learner profiles?

Chapter 5:

Options and Opportunities

To be completed before the Chapter 5 session:

- Read Chapter 5.
- Reflect on the educational options, opportunities, or alternatives that were available to you as a K–12 student. Which experience(s) left a lasting impression? Why?

Facilitator Note: *The pre-session assignment asks participants to reflect on their own educational experiences whether or not they viewed those experiences as gifted programming. The goal is to explore the personal benefits of educational alternatives.*

1. What options in each of these categories exist in your district for gifted learners?
 - Finding appropriately challenging work
 - Exploring an interest
 - Spending more time with gifted peers
 - Adjusting school or home to better accommodate personal needs
2. What enrichment opportunities are available in your community?
3. What additional options would you like to offer?
 - How does your district inform students of academic, cocurricular, and extracurricular options?
4. What specific measures are used in your district to ensure that students and their parents are aware of these opportunities?
5. List the educational initiatives that have impacted you as an educator.
6. Which have been beneficial in meeting the needs of gifted students? Which have been detrimental?
7. What is the current primary initiative in your district? How can it be used to support gifted students?

Chapter 6:

Advocates and Advisors

To be completed before the Chapter 6 session:

- Read Chapter 6.
- List the people who were your educational advocates, advisors, and mentors. In what ways did they affect your education and your life?

1. Describe your role as an advocate for self-advocacy.
2. Do the teacher and school counselor preservice programs in your state or province include aspects of gifted education? If not, what resources are available to fill that gap?
3. What other staff members in your district serve directly as advocates for gifted students?
4. In what ways can you help parents become well-informed advocates?
5. In what ways can you help other educators become well-informed advocates?
6. How can you spread ownership of gifted education in your district?

Chapter 7: Paths and Plans

To be completed before the Chapter 7 session:

- Read Chapter 7.
- List the gifted students you work with who currently are most in need of an action plan for change.

1. How common is it for gifted students in your district to have individual or differentiated educational plans?
2. Will it be challenging for students to self-advocate? Why or why not?
3. Which district policies or state/provincial laws might affect students' plans?
4. Who are the educators in your district most likely to encourage, facilitate, and endorse such a plan? Who are the “yes” people you would suggest students approach? Who are the “no” people you would steer students away from?
5. Using the action plan template on page 176, describe a successful gifted student's plan for change that you helped (or would like to help) facilitate.
 - What are the steps?
 - Who is responsible for each step?
 - What is the timeline?

Chapter 8: Workshops and Ways Forward

To be completed before the Chapter 8 session:

- Read Chapter 8.
- Is there a precedent for student workshops or other meetings in your district? What other student groups are provided with time together away from the school day or week? Athletes? Speech or drama students? Music students? Clubs or organizations? Students with disabilities?

Facilitator Note: *The pre-session assignment is intended to encourage participants to feel justified in asking for equal time and expenditure for gifted students.*

1. Which model for direct instruction of self-advocacy would work best in your district?
2. What might be some of the barriers to providing direct instruction?
3. Which of the NAGC PreK–Grade 12 Programming Standards related to self-advocacy (see pages 115–117) are already being addressed in your district?
4. Following direct instruction, what format could be used to expand students' self-advocacy skills and remind and encourage students to continue to self-advocate throughout their school years?

Chapter 9: Conclusions and Commencements

To be completed before the Chapter 9 session:

- Read Chapter 9.
- Describe why you are or are not ready to focus on self-advocacy with your gifted students.

1. How could self-advocacy fit into your district's current gifted education plan?
2. Discuss ways in which you as a group or individually might empower self-advocacy in your students.
3. Using the template on page 176, create your own action plan for empowering your students to self-advocate. Include the necessary steps, the people responsible for each step, and a workable timeline.
4. Share your plans

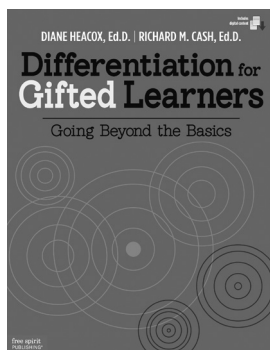


About the Author

Deb Douglas consults and advocates for gifted kids in the Upper Midwest and beyond, specializing in workshops that help kids take charge of their own educations. Her original research on empowering gifted students to self-advocate was published in *The Roeper Review* and *Parenting for High Potential* more than a dozen years ago. She is a frequent presenter at national and state conferences. Previously she was the gifted education coordinator for the Manitowoc (WI) Public School District for fifteen years and developed their International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. She began her career teaching high school English, speech, and theater, and then served as a gifted resource teacher for seven years. She was president of the Wisconsin Association for Talented and Gifted from 2011 to 2013 and a board member for nine years.

Deb's guilty pleasures include travel, British murder mysteries, kayaking, gardening, morning coffee, and *The New York Times* crossword. She is the mother, stepmother, and mother-in-law of five uniquely talented adults, and grandmother to the magnificent Miles and awesome Anthony. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin, with her husband, Ramon Aldag—professor of business at the University of Wisconsin, Madison—and their wickedly gifted Bichon, Lily. She can be reached via her website www.gtcarpediem.com, Twitter @debdouglas52, and [facebook.com/GTCarpeDiem](https://www.facebook.com/GTCarpeDiem).

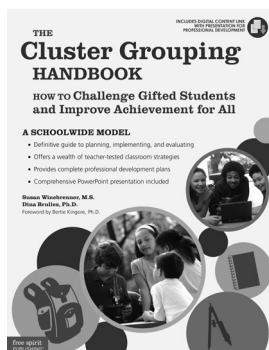
Other Great Resources from Free Spirit



Differentiation for Gifted Learners
Going Beyond the Basics
by *Diane Heacox, Ed.D., and Richard M. Cash, Ed.D.*

For K–12 teachers, gifted education teachers, program directors, administrators, instructional coaches, curriculum developers.

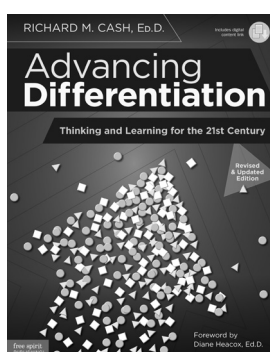
224 pp.; paperback; 8½" x 11"; includes digital content



The Cluster Grouping Handbook: A Schoolwide Model
How to Challenge Gifted Students and Improve Achievement for All
by *Susan Winebrenner, M.S., and Dina Brulles, Ph.D.*

For teachers and administrators, grades K–8.

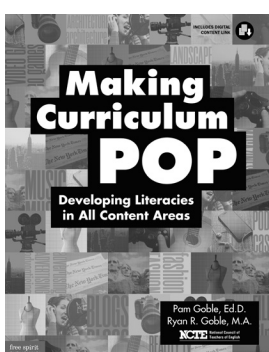
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Advancing Differentiation
Thinking and Learning for the 21st Century
(Revised & Updated Edition)
by *Richard M. Cash, Ed.D.*

For teachers and administrators, grades K–12.

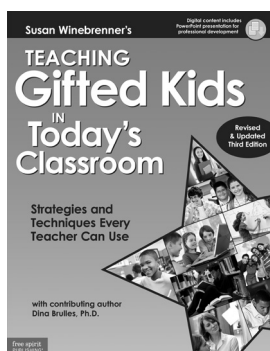
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Making Curriculum POP
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by *Pam Goble, Ed.D., and Ryan R. Goble, M.A.* Developed in partnership with NCTE

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