



# NRC/GT Query: Are Programs and Services for Gifted and Talented Students Responsive to Beliefs?

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Identifying and serving gifted and talented students is practiced around the country and the world by many educators in response to professional and personal beliefs, legislation, or educational practices. For centuries, people found it critical to search for children who had the potential to contribute to self and society in such ways that they were beyond expectations of cognitive development and age. The phrase “in comparison to others” was one way to think about differences among learners. NRC/GT researchers (1997) associated with a study of professional development practices to extend gifted education strategies to all learners presented the following qualities:

- prior knowledge or skill expertise
- learning rate
- cognitive ability
- learning style preference
- motivation, attitude, and effort
- interest, strength, or talent.

If individuals differ in these ways or others, then how do we view the talents and gifts of students in our schools and classrooms? Is it a matter of defining terms, reflecting on beliefs about abilities, or providing professional development opportunities?

## Defining Terms

There is no universally accepted definition of gifted and talented, intelligence, talent development, creative productivity, or learning ability. Perhaps there should not be; however, there must be an understanding of human abilities and how they manifest themselves in school-based, community-based, and work-based settings. When a group of educators was asked recently to define some of the terms above, several definitions were offered:

Gifted and talented means individuals have the capacity to learn that is measurably different from their same-age peers.

Intelligence is a psychological construct used to describe abilities that require reasoning, wisdom, and insight.

Talent development is a process of recognizing, nurturing, and supporting the skills and abilities of people who have not already demonstrated complete mastery.

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# The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented Newsletter

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Creative productivity is the confluence of intellectual and affective human traits directed by an individual's interests and willingness to develop a written, visual, or auditory product or performance that did not already exist in the same exact form in a specific field of study.

Learning ability is a demonstrated propensity to acquire new knowledge or skills.

These suggested definitions are most likely as adequate as those proposed by researchers and theorists in psychology, human development, sociology, and education. They reflect personal and professional perspectives. Would everyone agree with each definition? Probably not. A wordsmith or two would work together until there was a general consensus on the interpretation and importance of each word and determine its implications within and across all cultural groups and at all levels of economic status.

### Reflecting on Beliefs About Abilities

Defining terms related to human abilities is a useful task, because it reveals underlying beliefs, personal biases, and multiple perspectives. Several definitions were created through national studies. In response to Public Law 91-230, Section 806(c) authored by former Senator Jacob K. Javits of New York, Sidney P. Marland, Commissioner of Education for the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, evaluated the status of education for gifted and talented children by conducting public hearings, reviewing existing Federal education programs, studying programs in representative states, convening an advisory panel, and completing a survey of states. The advisory panel established the following definition of gifted and talented:

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contributions to self and society.

Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential in any of the following areas:

1. General intellectual ability
2. Specific academic aptitude
3. Creative or productive thinking
4. Leadership ability
5. Visual or performing arts
6. Psychomotor ability

It can be assumed that utilization of these criteria for identification of the gifted and talented will encompass a minimum of 3 to 5 percent of the school population.

Evidence of gifted and talented abilities may be determined by a multiplicity of ways. These procedures should include objective measures and professional evaluation measures which are essential components of identification.

Professionally qualified persons include such individuals as teachers, administrators, school psychologists, counselors, curriculum specialists, artists, musicians, and others with special training who are also qualified to appraise pupils' special competencies. (Marland, 1972, pp. 10-11)

The advisory panel and the external review team members (including Dr. Joseph S. Renzulli, University of Connecticut, Dr. James J. Gallagher, University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, and William G. Vassar, former Consultant on Gifted and Talented Education, Connecticut State Department of Education) also suggested three characteristics of programs to meet the needs of gifted and talented students:

1. A differentiated curriculum which denotes higher cognitive concepts and processes.
2. Instructional strategies which accommodate the learning styles of the gifted and talented and curriculum content.
3. Special grouping arrangements which include a variety of administrative procedures appropriate to particular children, i.e., special classes, honor classes, seminars, resource rooms, and the like. (Marland, 1972, p. 11)

Congress revised the Marland definition in 1978 by including pre-school, elementary, or secondary students and eliminating psychomotor ability. The emphasis on demonstrated or potential abilities

remained along with the notion of required services that are not commonly part of most school's opportunities:

Children and, whenever applicable, youth who are identified at the pre-school, elementary, or secondary level as possessing demonstrated or potential abilities that give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, specific academic or leadership ability or in the performing and visual arts, and who by reason thereof require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school. (United States Congress, Educational Amendment of 1978 [P.L. 93-561, IX (A)])

The 1978 definition remained as is until the Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988 was passed. Modifications were made, such as replacing designated grade levels with the phrase "children and youth" and eliminating the phrase "possessing demonstrated or potential abilities."

The term "gifted and talented" means children and youth who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities. (P.L. 100-297, Sec. 4130)

Defining terms was also one of many tasks undertaken by a steering group brought together by the United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, to revisit the prior national definition from the 1972 Marland report, later updated in 1978, and the Javits definition of 1988. The steering group shared perspectives as teachers, administrators, professors, researchers, and business people. Their perspectives were then discussed with others within and outside the Department of Education and feedback was sought as ideas were refined. As a result of all the deliberations, the following report was produced in 1993: *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent*. The report focuses on the quiet crisis in educating the Nation's most talented students. The "quiet crisis" in education reflected how we continue to neglect the talents and abilities of top students and how we continue to under-challenge many students because of preconceived limits or

expectations of how they learn and apply their talents and abilities. Once again, a revised national definition was crafted:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment.

These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools.

Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (United States Department of Education, 1993, p. 26)

Review the definitions listed above or review your state definition. Think about your responses to the following questions:

- How do you define the characteristics of gifted and talented students?
- If you live in a state that mandates identification and programming, does the definition reflect your beliefs about students' abilities?
- What services and activities would challenge the talents and abilities of students?
- Do you know how to identify and nurture manifest, emergent, or latent talents?
- Do you have experience with students who perform at remarkably high levels?
- What is your understanding of high-level accomplishments?
- Would talents be recognized in all areas of human endeavor?
- What are your professional development needs to successfully identify gifted and talented students and provide challenging programming opportunities?

At first, these questions may seem easy to answer if you are completing the exercise by yourself. They require reflection on your personal and professional

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beliefs and in-depth understanding on the varying needs of talented students. To determine whether your responses are similar to others, organize a small group of people and ask them to share individual and group perspectives. Questions such as those listed above would be great discussion starters for professional development opportunities.

### Recognizing Professional Development Needs

The National Excellence report emphasized the importance of professional development as one step to addressing the “quiet crisis” in education:

Teachers must receive better training in how to teach high-level curricula. They need support for providing instruction that challenges all students sufficiently. This will benefit not only students with outstanding talent but children at every academic level. (United States Department of Education, 1993, p. 3)

What would it take for teachers to respond to this “quiet crisis” and to determine the status of programs and services for gifted and talented students (see Renzulli & Reis, 1991)? The research agenda for The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented included a focus on regular classroom practices. In the early 1990s, we wanted to know the extent to which grade 3 and grade 4 teachers modified their instructional practices for average students and gifted students. Results of the national survey reported that

- 61% of the public school teachers had no training in gifted education
- 54% of the private school teachers had no training in gifted education. (Archambault et al., 1993, p. 43)

Why were these results a reality? Part of the reason for this reality is that very few universities and colleges offer courses in meeting the needs of gifted and talented students for undergraduate students. Oftentimes, future teachers are introduced to these students’ special academic and affective needs during one course in special education, of which one class spends about 45 minutes dealing with the topic. So, what are prospective teachers supposed to do? Obviously, each person can pursue learning opportunities through many techniques:

- Journals, newsletters, books
- Workshops, conferences, graduate coursework
- Observations, visitations
- Videotapes and audiotapes
- Discussion groups

These formal and informal approaches to professional development may or may not be enough for individual teachers to experiment with different strategies and practices related to teaching and learning. Teachers can be made aware of different strategies and practices, determine their relevance to their current position, and evaluate the extent to which they have a positive impact on students and teachers alike. These are not easy tasks. Typically, workshops and conferences are organized by school districts and professional organizations. Presenters are chosen for their specialty and may conduct a half-day, full day, or several days of training to a small or large group of educators. Will these educators learn and apply suggested strategies as a result of these training opportunities? It is hard to answer this question for the entire group of educators. Perhaps some will change; perhaps others will receive confirmation of their current strategies and practices; perhaps others will pursue further training; and perhaps still others will resist any change. The realities of offering opportunities to learn and apply different strategies and practices require more than a “one time only” or short term involvement in any new innovation. Scaling up a practice promoted by educators, but not fully integrated into teachers’ repertoires, may result in resistance to change. Fullan (1993) describes the process of change as a result of extensive study, reflection, and review. The following “Eight Basic Lessons of the New Paradigm of Change” resulted from his work and are documented in *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform*:

- Lesson One: You Can’t Mandate What Matters (The more complex the change the less you can force it)
- Lesson Two: Change is a Journey not a Blueprint (Change is non-linear, loaded with uncertainty and excitement and sometimes perverse)
- Lesson Three: Problems are Our Friends (Problems are inevitable and you can’t learn without them)

- Lesson Four: Vision and Strategic Planning Come Later  
(Premature visions and planning blind)
- Lesson Five: Individualism and Collectivism Must Have Equal Power  
(There are no one-sided solutions to isolation and groupthink)
- Lesson Six: Neither Centralization Nor Decentralization Works  
(Both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary)
- Lesson Seven: Connection with the Wider Environment is Critical for Success  
(The best organizations learn externally as well as internally)
- Lesson Eight: Every Person is a Change Agent  
(Change is too important to leave to the experts, personal mind set and mastery is the ultimate protection) (pp. 21-22)

Fullan’s lessons offer a reality check for many of us who reflect on the needs of teachers and students alike and think about how we can make the learning better. We may not have immediate answers, but there are ways to think about the types of services that would be most appropriate.

**Developing a Continuum of Services**

School districts should create a continuum of local services as an exercise to determine the extent to which multiple opportunities are responsive to students’ talents and abilities. Are services available to all, some, or just one student? Should services be unique to some children or just one child? What is appropriate for your school and classroom? Even, more importantly, what is your district’s philosophy about meeting the needs of students? Oftentimes, a district’s philosophy will state, “we want students to reach their potential.” Does that sound familiar or is the phrase more of a paper promise to the students and the community? One example of an integrated continuum of services (see Figure 1) focuses on the

**The Integrated Continuum of Special Services**

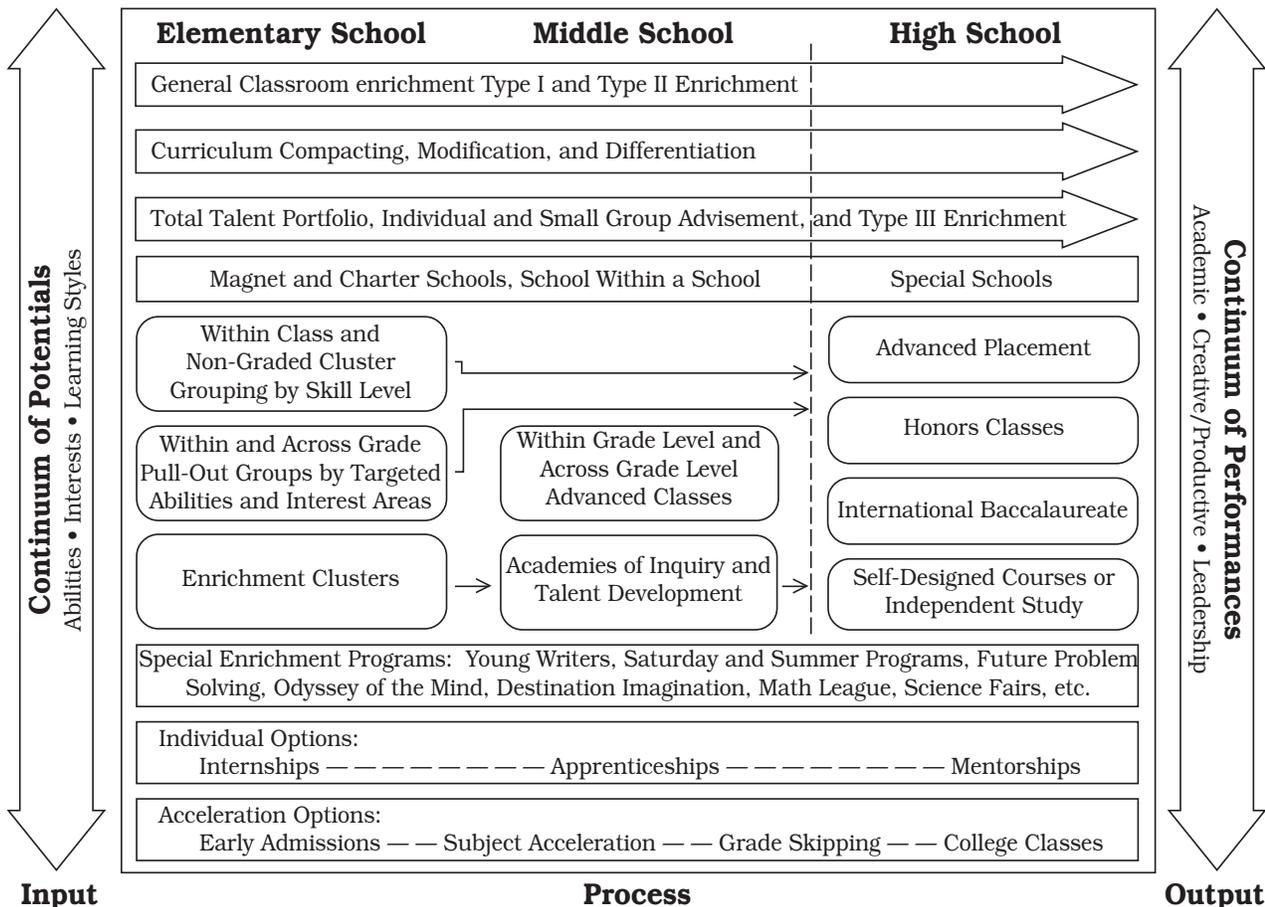


Figure 1. The continuum of services for total talent development, Renzulli & Reis, 1985, p. 25.

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specifics of programming for elementary, middle, and high school students. Note the orientation of the continuum: input, process, and output are spaced horizontally. Vertical sidebars, which are more recent additions to the 1985 diagram, emphasize the continuum of potentials (i.e., abilities, interests, and learning styles) and the continuum of performances (i.e., academic, creative productive, and leadership).

As a second exercise, change the continuum into a short questionnaire by grade level clusters (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school). Ask administrators and teachers to circle existing services. Share the information and then ask them to discuss the possibility of considering additional services.

### Continuum of Services

How many of these special services apply to your elementary school (ES), middle school (MS), and high school (HS)? Circle the appropriate school levels.

#### Individual Options:

ES	MS	HS	Internships
ES	MS	HS	Apprenticeships
ES	MS	HS	Mentorships

#### Acceleration Options:

ES	MS	HS	Early Admission
ES	MS	HS	Subject Acceleration
ES	MS	HS	College Classes

What services do your students need? To what extent are existing services connected to students' skills, abilities, talents, and interests? Does your school district prefer one or more services for some or all grade levels? What services should be added, modified, or reconsidered? Approach these questions or others by asking if the services are appropriate for all students, some students, or one student. Remember professional development should also be designed in response to educators' needs and the requirements of specific services. Knowing, understanding, and nurturing the gifts and talents of your students are steps to enhancing educational opportunities for the entire school district.

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### 4 New Monographs from NRC/GT

[www.gifted.uconn.edu/resource.html](http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/resource.html)

Counseling Gifted and Talented Students (order # RM02150)

E. Paul Torrance: His Life, Accomplishments, and Legacy (order # RM02152)

The Effects of Grouping and Curricular Practices on Intermediate Students' Math Achievement (order # RM02154)

Developing the Talents and Abilities of Linguistically Gifted Bilingual Students: Guidelines for Developing Curriculum at the High School Level (order # RM02156)

# Recurring Themes in Career Counseling of Gifted and Talented Students

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## Introduction

To move forward in any field it is important to assess its current state, to note issues that remain the same, and to look for new trends. In this review of literature, some research-based and some not, recurring themes in career counseling for gifted and talented students are presented for re-examination.

Choosing a career is a lifelong process that demands accurate perceptions of ability, potential, and achievement (Kelly, 1996). Many career choices must be made during the lifespan, requiring much thought and reflection in the decision-making. A lifelong approach to career development is needed as career plans “are based on a long series of iterative decisions made throughout our lives” (Watts, 1996, p. 46). Career plans must be constantly revised to adapt to a continually changing world.

Different stages exist in career awareness and career maturity (Kelly & Colangelo, 1990; Super, 1980), but central to all of these stages are the common issues of decision-making, development of identity, and exploration. Modern career counseling should teach students self-awareness and decision-making to help them build satisfying lives (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999) and help in the development of necessary attitudes, skills, and academic pursuits for career exploration and planning.

Research and current literature indicate training and attention in schools to nonacademic issues such as career needs is minimal (Frederickson, 1986; Kelly, 1996; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999; Moon, Kelly, & Feldhusen, 1997; Perrone, 1997; Watts, 1996). By not addressing the career needs of gifted and talented students in our schools, our society loses potential contributions, and many of these individuals continue to be anxious, confused, or frustrated about their career decisions. Gifted and talented adolescents require more than attention to their

academic pursuits. While in the planning phase of career decision-making, individuals in late adolescence are also establishing their identity. A solid sense of self is the underpinning for clarifying plans and aspirations (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) thus, self-concept may be positively related to career certainty and career planning.

Gifted and talented students may face more challenges in career development than their age-peers due to possible additional psychosocial issues that may affect their sense of identity, including multipotentiality (Kelly & Hall, 1994; Perrone, 1997), early cognitive maturation (Frederickson, 1986; Kelly & Colangelo, 1990), unhealthy perfectionism and stress from the high expectations of significant others (Clark, 1992; Perrone, 1997; Schuler, 2000; Silverman, 1993). Gifted and talented females may also face further challenges in career development (Arnold, Noble, & Subotnik, 1996; Hollinger & Fleming, 1992; Kerr, 1994; Reis, 1998; Rimm, 1999). Some of the literature is research-based and some is not, however the issues above proliferate in discussions of gifted education and talent development.

## Multipotentiality

Multipotentiality is frequently cited as a problem for gifted and talented students in career planning (Clark, 1992; Kelly & Hall, 1994; Perrone, 1997; Silverman, 1993), although little empirical research demonstrates that this is, in fact, the case. In a 1997 study of 1,000 gifted adolescents, Achter, Benbow, and Lubinski found that only 5% truly displayed multipotentiality when above-level assessments of abilities and preferences were used. While intellectual ability was high across many academic subject areas, these multipotential students were actually diverse in their strengths and relative weaknesses, predispositions, and likes or loves for certain subject areas.

According to Berger (1989), the problem facing gifted students in their career planning may not be multipotentiality, but the lack of decision-making skills. Instead of focusing on their many existing abilities, these students should be encouraged to explore other aspects of their lives, such as their values, life-goals, and leisure activities (Stewart, 1999). By doing so, students learn to expand their experiences and develop new talents. Rysiew, Shore,

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and Carson (1994) assert that career decision-making is not a problem for students with multiple abilities, unless accompanied by multiple interests, motivations, and opportunities. Students are often expected to choose areas of specialization before they have even really experienced post-secondary institutions offerings as fields of study or majors.

### Gifted and Talented Females

While many career counseling issues are the same for both genders, the career decision making process for gifted girls may present more challenges than for gifted boys because of girls' earlier puberty and emotional maturation, along with greater self-concept discrepancies, higher and multiple societal ideals imposed on them and a minority status in some male-dominated occupational settings (Arnold, Noble & Subotnik, 1996; Kerr, 1994; Randall, 1997; Reis, 1998). Unfortunately for gifted girls, many of the same obstacles to career eminence have remained since the 1970s (Reis, 1998).

Some adolescent girls continue to opt out of the most challenging classes and lower their occupational aspirations as they progress through the educational system (Gottfredson, 1981; Reis, 1998), even though academic preparation and aspirations are crucial to college success (Gladieux & Swail, 2000).

Gifted girls tend to have more dominant career orientation, less traditional sex-role orientation, and a greater need to achieve in academic and occupational arenas than other females in general (Wollett, 1979). While at the same time, the successful integration of career and family is of concern to most females with high career aspirations and is of more concern to females than to males (Reis, 1998). In a study of almost 1,000 college students, Novack and Novack (1996) found that 80% of females planned on attending graduate school and said they would be more committed to their careers than to marriage. However, a potential conflict is evident when one considers that 97% of these young women also said they planned to marry and 92% said they would be willing to make a career sacrifice for their husbands. Appropriate career counseling for females must realistically address both the difficulties and the advantages in successfully combining career and family.

Girls benefit from mentorships, with female mentors when possible, throughout their education (Beck, 1989; Gladieux & Swail, 2000; Reis, 1998). In Beck's study on the effects of a mentoring program for high school females (1989), she found that career development was the area the most affected by the mentorship, and that females felt more strongly than males that the mentorship helped them look at ways to combine career and family. Kerr (2000), however, believes that all of the work of high school mentoring can be undone in a year and a half at college. Gifted and talented college girls frequently succumb to the culture of romance at this level, realizing that status on campus is most often achieved by having a relationship with "a great guy," rather than by the pursuit of academic excellence and achievement (Erwin & Stewart, 1997; Kerr, 1994; Reis, 1995).

### Unhealthy Perfectionism and High Expectations of Others

Unreasonably high expectations of self and unhealthy or neurotic perfectionism (Schuler, 2000) may lead to problems in choosing a career path (Clark, 1992; Kelly & Hall, 1994; Novack & Novack, 1996; Silverman, 1993). An unhealthy perfectionist can be immobilized because of a desire to be perfect. The pressure to make the perfect career choice, to please significant others, including parents, teachers, and peers, can cause anxiety and fear of failure, which in turn may lead to indecision (Stewart, 1999), delaying decision making about careers, or frequent change of college major (Frederickson, 1986).

Another possibility is that to gain approval or hold love, gifted and talented adolescents may choose to behave according to the expectations of others rather than pursue personal fulfillment (Colozzi & Colozzi, 2000). This preoccupation with the opinions and expectations of others can be an advantage, as in a positive mentoring situation, or a distinct disadvantage. Some gifted and talented students, and in particular females, do not pursue their own dreams because they feel they must conform to the wishes of their parents (Reis, 1998).

### Early Cognitive Maturity and Vocational Identity

Super (1980) explains career or vocational maturity as the knowledge of one's career interests, abilities, and goals in relation to the work world. Gifted students have demonstrated earlier career maturity by being more certain of career choices than other

students (Kelly & Colangelo, 1990). This early, and sometimes premature certainty, may actually limit the further exploration of career possibilities, especially in college, where more choices are offered (Frederickson, 1986). Often, academically gifted students choose careers that require 10 or more years of post-secondary training (Stewart, 1999), and if this career decision is made early due to cognitive maturation without synchronous emotional maturation, the adolescent may not be able to consider the long range planning, persistence, and self-sacrifice needed to achieve the intended career goal. Kerr and Colangelo (1988) found that 50% of intellectually gifted college-bound students in their high school study selected majors from only three areas, engineering, health professions, and physical science, even though they were presented with almost 200 possibilities and had self-identified broad extracurricular interests. The long-term training for most professional careers also requires a certain amount of dependence, both financial and emotional, while the gifted population often needs to assert more independence at an earlier age (Silverman, 1993).

Kelly (1992) found that as a group, gifted students perceived fewer career barriers than other students, that gifted boys expressed more interest in a wider range of occupations than gifted girls, and that gifted girls seemed to attain more career information on their own than their male counterparts. Gagné and Poirier (1990) studied over 400 eighth and twelfth graders and found that over half of the students made their career choices based on limited personal knowledge of only 10 professions. Appropriate and ongoing career counseling could help many young students who know little about the changing nature of the work world or the myriad of occupations in it.

### Conclusion

There are many opposing beliefs about the nature of what counts as educational knowledge, for instance research-based studies versus reviews of literature, but what is certain is that there is much more that we need to know about career counseling for the diverse gifted and talented population. To provide appropriate career counseling for all gifted and talented students, additional areas seldom addressed in the existing literature need to be further explored. Areas of future consideration should include:

- the career needs of gifted and talented students who underachieve;
- the emphasis on college for gifted students;
- members of special populations of gifted and talented such as:
  - emotionally gifted,
  - creatively gifted,
  - disadvantaged,
  - gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender;
- the importance of chance in career development.

A lifespan approach to career counseling is crucial, acknowledging that occupational interests, competencies, creativity, and preferences may indeed change over time. Career counseling must also be tailored for individual needs of a diverse population. A collaborative career counseling effort among counselors, parents, and teachers can help each student develop a personal definition of identity, achievement, and career success after careful self-analysis of abilities, life goals, and occupational possibilities.

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# Dealing With the Needs of Underachieving Gifted Students in a Suburban School District: What Works!

Ceil Frey  
Rosemont College  
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When I saw *A Beautiful Mind* and then read the book on which the movie was based (Nasar, 1998), I thought back to my 26 years of working with gifted students, about 1/4 of them with the kinds of off-putting characteristics exhibited by John Nash. Following are my reflections as a former teacher and supervisor in a program that is somewhat unique for its emphasis on “saving” underachievers.

When we think of schools’ goals for students, especially gifted students, most mission statements include “helping students to reach their potential.” Implied in those words is the message that both grades and conformity are important and that students must play the “school game” to succeed. As a result, many districts have high achievement, as measured by grades and standardized test scores, as a basic requirement for entrance into a gifted program.

Lower Merion School District (in Ardmore, Pennsylvania), on the other hand, has targeted gifted underachievers as one important audience for participation in its gifted program; this has been true since the inception of the program in 1976. As the program description says:

*Lower Merion School District identifies gifted underachievers as a target group for participation in gifted support class. These students demonstrate a significant discrepancy between their cognitive potential and their performance in the classroom. (Lower Merion Gifted Support description, 2001)*

How do we determine who these underachievers are? After examining the literature on underachievement, we recognized that these students may demonstrate remarkable strengths or talents in some areas and

disabling weaknesses in others (Baum, Dixon, & Owen, 1991). Further, research from The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (Díaz, Hébert, Maxfield, Ratley, & Reis, 1995) supports the idea that underachieving gifted students have difficulty actualizing their talents and gifts without differentiated instruction. Over the years, we have found underachievers to fall into a variety of categories:

- female, especially during adolescence
- member of a non-dominant cultural group
- student with other identified exceptionalities, such as a need for learning support, emotional support, and/or speech and language support
- student with a physical disability
- student with significant discrepancies between measured verbal and performance abilities, and/or with certain patterns of scatter on the WISC III intelligence test
- a lower socioeconomic background
- a non-traditional learner
- student who demonstrates at-risk behaviors

The goals for gifted underachieving students are primarily “to develop the following school survival skills and tactics” (Lower Merion Gifted Support Description, 2001). Our first task is to teach students self-regulation strategies, including taking time for reflection about their actions. This can be through discussion (either group or individual) and/or through informal journal keeping.

Further, we try to help them understand the personal issues of underachievement. We discuss what the label of “gifted” means to them and to others who interact with them. Each gifted support classroom has numerous copies of *The Gifted Kids’ Survival Guide* and *Perfectionism: What’s Bad About Being Too Good*. The gifted support program in Lower Merion is not graded, nor do students get credit for attending, even in middle and high school. Instead, teachers (who are designated as fulltime teachers of the gifted) try to establish a classroom atmosphere where students are willing to take risks, both academically and socially, without some external judgment like a “bad grade” or a “silly idea” to make him/her feel different.

(continued on page 12)

(continued from page 11)

However, the gifted support program definitely has an intellectual and academic component. Students at the elementary grades are asked to choose a long range project in their area of interest, completing it as a practitioner in the field would, and then presenting it to an audience of peers, parents, and/or other students. Elementary students are first taught the basic skills that practitioners need: research techniques, planning for short and long range goals, deciding who the audience will be and then tailoring the product to the audience, and developing a rubric and timeline with the teacher—in advance—for the development of organizational and evaluation skills by the student him/herself. In middle schools, there are several themes offered each year; students continue to individualize their interests through their choice of topic and completion of a project. In addition, in sixth and seventh grades, advanced readers (determined by standardized tests) participate in literary circles once or twice a week. Often, these groups include underachievers. In high school, students work with gifted support teachers on both intellectual and social/emotional issues. Instead of a project, however, teachers and students select topics of interest, and these are discussed during the times students are scheduled to participate in the program (traditionally once or twice a week). Teachers may select newspaper or magazine articles, short stories or essays, or a video clip from a television news magazine. Again, students are not graded for their participation.

I believe the program for underachievers is successful for several reasons. First, there is at least one fulltime teacher in each of the district's 10 schools. There are more at the middle and high schools. This gives the teacher(s) of the gifted time to work with classroom teachers as both a resource for materials and a way for classroom teachers and specialists to understand the individual students more clearly. Second, parents, students, and staff are all very comfortable with the model of the program. No one has asked for grades or curriculum extensions in the past; this allows the students free rein to explore topics they might not ordinarily be able to pursue. Further, because of Pennsylvania law, there is at least one IEP (called GIEP) meeting each year for each identified gifted student. Gifted students are mixed in the pullout portion of the gifted program; we never have classes of “just” underachievers or high

achievers. All students in the district are eligible to take all credit classes (provided they meet the criteria of the academic department). There is no “gifted track” where only identified gifted students may participate. Last, our multiple criteria allow many dually identified students to participate both in the resource room and in the gifted program.

Have all of our students “made it” in the “real world?” Except for a few, I would say almost all have. They may be in non-traditional professions, or have taken longer to finish college, but they are happy and productive individuals. After 26 years, I feel very comfortable with the Lower Merion program; it really does meet the needs of its students, including both high achievers and underachievers. John Nash was successful because those closest to him accepted him for what he was; his mother, sister, wife, peers, and colleagues understood that he might be “different” but that he had a great deal to offer the world. This is the most basic goal of Lower Merion's program: to help all gifted kids reach their potential, and to affirm their special gifts, despite individual behaviors and differences which might stand in their way.

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## Impact of the NRC/GT Research

DIRECTIONS: Please review and respond by circling the appropriate number (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Please return the survey to:

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented • University of Connecticut •  
2131 Hillside Road Unit 3007 • Storrs, CT 06269-3007

For each statement below, circle the number that best describes your response.

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. NRC/GT's research products and materials have been appropriate and they meet my needs.	1	2	3	4	5
2. NRC/GT's products and research findings have been useful in understanding the educational issues related to identifying and serving students with high abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
3. NRC/G's research products and findings have been useful in providing professional development to others in my district.	1	2	3	4	5
4. NRC/GT's research findings have been useful in contributing to my knowledge about gifted and talented students.	1	2	3	4	5
5. NRC/GT's research products and findings have been useful in identifying students for gifted programming.	1	2	3	4	5
6. NRC/GT's research products and findings have had an impact on gifted identification practices in my district.	1	2	3	4	5
7. NRC/GT's research products and findings have been useful in recognizing talent in different types of students.	1	2	3	4	5
8. NRC/GT's research products and findings have had an impact on gifted programming practices in my district.	1	2	3	4	5
9. NRC/GT's research products and findings have been useful in reviewing and modifying curricular options for high-end learning.	1	2	3	4	5
10. NRC/GT's research products and findings have been useful in changing my approach to teaching.	1	2	3	4	5

To what extent does our work contribute to your knowledge or understanding of educational issues related to identifying and serving students with high abilities?

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## NRC/GT Announces Plans for a Large National Study

Ever wonder why some of the brightest students are underachievers? The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) is exploring the reasons some bright students underachieve. The NRC/GT has developed several interventions to help bright, underachieving students to become more achievement oriented. During the 2002-2003 school year, the NRC/GT will be conducting a large, national research study to test the efficacy of these treatments.

The NRC/GT is seeking classroom teachers and teachers of the gifted in grades 5-8 who would be interested in working with one or two bright, underachieving students to implement one of the treatments in their classrooms. The study will begin in September 2002 and end in April 2003.

In addition to the large, national study, the NRC/GT is also seeking schools that are willing to pilot test instruments during the 2001-2002 school year. This would entail having students and/or teachers anonymously complete 1-2 survey forms. Interested parties should contact The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at 860-486-4678 or [dorothy.mccoach@uconn.edu](mailto:dorothy.mccoach@uconn.edu) for additional information.

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) is looking for elementary and middle schools that are willing to participate in a series of research studies on academically able underachievers. If you are interested in receiving more information on this study, please return this form to the address at the bottom. Thank you.



District Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Superintendent: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade Levels Within the School: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address of Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Please send our school/district information about participating in a research study on the underachievement of academically able students in conjunction with The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.

Please return this form to:

Del Siegle, Ph.D.  
 The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented  
 University of Connecticut  
 2131 Hillside Road Unit 3007  
 Storrs, CT 06269-3007  
 Phone: 860-486-4678  
 Fax: 860-486-2900  
 E-mail: [dorothy.mccoach@uconn.edu](mailto:dorothy.mccoach@uconn.edu) or [dsiegle@uconn.edu](mailto:dsiegle@uconn.edu)

## Awards and Honors

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented wishes to congratulate the following people on their recent awards and honors:

Dr. Robert J. Sternberg, Director of the Center for Psychology of Abilities, Competencies, and Expertise (PACE Center), was recently elected president of the American Psychological Association (APA). As the APA president, Dr. Sternberg plans to collaborate with governmental agencies to enhance funding of new research opportunities, including funding for psychological science studies.

Dr. Joseph S. Renzulli, Director of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut, was awarded the *Distinguished Service Award* from the National Association for Gifted Children.

Dr. Carolyn M. Callahan, Associate Director of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Virginia, was recently honored with the *Outstanding Higher Education Professional* award from the Neag School of Education Alumni Society at the University of Connecticut.

Dr. Del Siegle, researcher with The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut, was re-elected to the Board of the National Association for Gifted Children. He also was awarded the *Early Leader Award* from the National Association for Gifted Children. The Pi Lambda Theta Beta Sigma Chapter named Dr. Del Siegle *Outstanding Educator*.

Dr. Elena Grigorenko, Deputy Director of the PACE Center, was the recipient of the APA Psychology and the Arts (Division 10) *Berlyne Early Career Award*. Last year, Dr. Grigorenko was honored with the *Koch Early Career Award* for APA Division 24 (Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology).

Dr. Mary Frasier, the former Associate Director of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Georgia, was selected as the recipient of the *2002 Adherhold Distinguished Professor Award* by the Colleges Awards Committee at the University of Georgia. The award was established to honor faculty members for excellence in research, teaching, and outreach/service.

Dr. Rena F. Subotnik is the Director of the Center for Psychology in the Schools and in Education at the American Psychological Association (APA) in Washington, DC. Prior to this position, she was involved in designing and administering the Center for Gifted Education Policy (CGEP) funded by the APA and housed in the Education Directorate ([www.apa.org/ed/cgep.html](http://www.apa.org/ed/cgep.html)). In addition, Dr. Subotnik is one of the research investigators for the Yale University research study entitled "Transitions in the Development of Giftedness: Musical Talent."

Dr. Sally M. Reis, Department Head and Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Connecticut, received The Ruth A. Martinson Memorial Past President's Award from the California Association for the Gifted for significant contribution that has had a substantial national impact on the education of the gifted students.



We are pleased to announce that the video, "ArtShow: Youth and Community Development," directed by Shirley Brice Heath, has received several honors. They include: Gold Award for Community Management Urban & Rural from Worldfest Houston, 2000; Bronze CINDY in Documentaries from the 42nd Annual International CINDY Competition, Fall 2000, International Association of Audio Visual Communicators; and the Bronze Plaque from the 48th Annual Columbus International Film & Video Festival, October 2000. The ArtShow video evolved from the NRC/GT research project entitled "Identifying, Teaching, and Evaluating the Talented Through Linguistic and Cultural Lenses."



## Diverse Populations in Gifted Education Programs Project

National Association for Gifted Children is very pleased to join The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented in a project that examines successful methods and strategies used to increase the participation of diverse populations of students in gifted and talented programming in school-based programs, after school, or in the summer. NAGC Past-President Sally M. Reis is coordinating the project.

We need your help to collect program information from across the country.

Please consider nominating exemplary programs that have successfully increased the participation of diverse students in gifted and talented programs.

Download and send the [diversity program letter](http://www.nagc.org/new/diversityletter.htm) ([www.nagc.org/new/diversityletter.htm](http://www.nagc.org/new/diversityletter.htm)) and the [survey matrix](http://www.nagc.org/new/diversitymatrix.htm) ([www.nagc.org/new/diversitymatrix.htm](http://www.nagc.org/new/diversitymatrix.htm)) directly to the nominated gifted education program.

**Send survey responses by May 15, 2002 to:**

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Please send change of address notification to the NRC/GT Mailing List at the address below or via e-mail to epsadm06@uconnvm.uconn.edu. Phone (860-486-4676) FAX (860-486-2900) Internet (www.gifted.uconn.edu).

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