Resources & ideas for parents & educators of gifted children

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Talent

Center for Talent DEVELOPMENT
School of Education & Social Policy

Winter 2011

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Effective Instruction

"How do schools best meet the needs of a gifted child? What does an appropriate and effective school program look like?" At Center for Talent Development, we are frequently asked these questions by parents. An important next question is, "How do I choose the right school for my child?" The answers are complex, obviously depending a great deal on the abilities, personality, temperament, and needs of an individual child and the match between these and what the school or program has to offer. No school will meet all the needs of an academically talented child, and parents may need to supplement via programs like CTD.

In this *Talent* we present the perspectives of three leading educators and advocates for gifted students on the key components of effective instruction for gifted learners—instruction that challenges students and makes them grow, engages and motivates them, and gives students opportunities to develop the personal characteristics needed for adult success. Inside you'll also find a short glossary of terms used when describing various approaches.

In the spring issue we will publish interviews with a number of parents of gifted children who have dealt with the "Which school is the right school for my child?" question.

As you plan for your child or your gifted program, keep these resources and approaches in mind. Also, be sure to check out the National Association for Gifted Children's new PreK – Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards. They have been recently revised and can help educators and parents know what to look for as they evaluate and choose programs, schools and supplemental educational opportunities for their child(ren). Feel free to share with other people you know who are also interested in high-quality gifted programs.

Paula Olszewski-Kubilius

Effectively Educating Gifted Kids: Three Perspectives on Practice

In classrooms across the country, gifted and talented students can be found doodling and daydreaming. Sometimes, they have been overlooked – their giftedness unidentified, their boredom misunderstood. Other times, they've been identified as gifted, but they aren't being challenged. Schools – and teachers – can be well-intentioned, but still unable to engage fully young minds. Putting funding issues aside, how should gifted students be taught? Is there a right way? Are there as many right ways as there are students?

Seeking answers to these questions, Center for Talent Development (CTD) gathered perspectives from three educators. We asked the critical question, "How do schools effectively educate gifted students?" of each of the following people:

- **Virginia Burney, PhD,** *a professor and consultant for high-ability education in Indiana,*
- **Cynthia Lardner, JD, MA, LLPC,** *parent of four gifted children and a licensed counselor on giftedness in Michigan, and*
- **Jack Palmer, MS,** *Northwestern University Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS) Liaison, retired teacher and program administrator in Wisconsin.*

CTD: What is good gifted program design?

Burney: Well, it all depends. The outcome we want for every student is both academic and personal growth. The question then becomes, "What services are needed when students have significantly different cognitive and affective characteristics and needs?" A particularly good treatment of this topic for gifted students comes in Karen Rogers' wonderful research synthesis. (See Rogers, K.B., in the "Resources" section of this issue.)

In this article, Rogers states that "there is no single practice or panacea that will work in every school setting and with every gifted or talented learner." What she found from the study was there are components within the services that must be present in order to facilitate growth. Those components include providing:

- Times for grouping gifted students together (See *Kids Like Me*).
- Acceleration when students have mastered the material or when they can move more quickly through content.
- Opportunities to pursue in-depth study or experiences in their area(s) of talent.
- Differentiated and more in-depth curriculum and instruction.
- Challenge on a daily basis.

Programming needs to provide a range of acceleration and enrichment options for

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WHO SAID THIS?

"Learning without thought is labor lost."

Answer at http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/resources/newslettersolutions

Effectively Educating Gifted Kids

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both individuals and for groups of students with similar needs. Rarely is it enough to "extend" the regular grade-level curriculum through an occasionally different assignment, learning activity or reading selection.

The learning experience needs to be qualitatively different in important and significant ways in order to challenge and develop the potential of the high-ability student. It must include advanced content knowledge; an emphasis on developing critical and creative thinking; an emphasis on collaboration and effective communication in a variety of formats; and enough challenge to develop productive work habits as well as confidence in the ability to tackle difficult tasks.

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) has developed PreK – Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards to help schools and districts develop appropriate programs and services. These standards, which include student outcomes and evidence-based practices, are available on the NAGC web site at http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=546. They are critical in creating an equitable, systematic and effective program whatever the specific model or set of methods utilized.

"Kids Like Me" – Gifted Education Grouping

"I loved meeting other kids like me – kids who are smart and who like learning." This is a quote heard often at CTD and other gifted programs. Research shows that grouping gifted students isn't just for student enjoyment; it positively impacts achievement. So much so, in fact, that gifted education models all tend to employ one of the following forms of ability grouping:

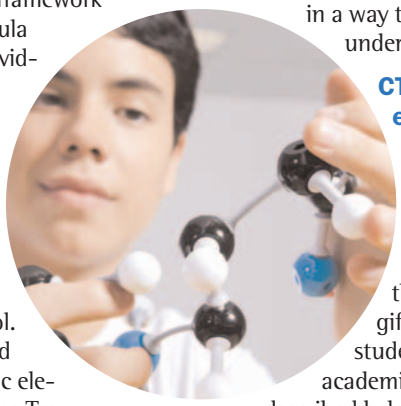
- **Pull-out programs:** Gifted students leave the regular classroom for one or more hours each week and are provided with enrichment activities and/or accelerated instruction.
- **Push-in programs:** Gifted students remain in a regular classroom and receive differentiated instruction by a gifted education specialist. Alternatively, a specialist collaborates with a classroom teacher to apply differentiation strategies for gifted learners.
- **Cluster grouping:** A group of two to six gifted students in the same grade are placed in a mixed ability classroom with a teacher who has had gifted education training. Students receive differentiated instruction for a proportionate amount of time each day.
- **Special classes:** Ranging from "honors" courses in high school to summer and Saturday gifted courses, this model targets gifted, and in some cases above-average learners, in particular subject areas.
- **Full-time grouping:** Occurring in schools for gifted children and in gifted programs within regular public and private schools, this model places gifted children in the same or multiple grade levels together full-time. All curriculum and instructional methodology is differentiated.

"Gifted programs that employ acceleration (increased pace) more than enrichment (depth and breadth) have more important learning effects at both [elementary and secondary] levels," writes Joyce VanTassel-Baska, consultant and professor emeritus, The College of William and Mary in Virginia, and former CTD director. "Differentiation, the process of adapting instruction to the needs and abilities of students, is key to enhanced learning within a grouping model."

CTD: What gifted program model(s) have you seen used effectively?

Lardner: I am most excited about a model called Universal Design for Learning (UDL). According to its designers, UDL is a research-based framework for designing curricula that enables all individuals to gain knowledge, skills and enthusiasm for learning.

The reason I understand UDL is that I watched it in action for 12 years at the Roeper School. I also saw it modeled quite well at a public elementary school in the Troy, Michigan, School District.



Three Principles of UDL

Three main principles of UDL include providing multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement.

Representation: Teachers present information and content in different ways, augmenting lectures, for example, with experiential activities, peer mentoring, technology-based activities and cooperative learning situations.

Action and Expression: Teachers differentiate the ways that students can express what they know and regularly probe students' thinking. Using verbal or written interviews, teachers learn how students take in, process and manipulate information.

Engagement: Stimulate interest and motivation for learning by taking student differences into account. Visual stimulation with posters and graphics may engage one student, while music, board games, role plays, or competitions may be ways to reach other students.

In any program, whether it be a gifted school, a program for the gifted, or a school that is looking to meet the needs of all children, a master teacher can use these UDL tools.

With UDL, you're not retrofitting education for a gifted kid, and you're not retrofitting for a child with a learning difference. You're presenting to all students in a way that each one can understand.

CTD: Give us an example of good gifted program design.

Palmer: One curriculum programming model through which gifted high school students and their academic peers benefit is described below. Supported by interviews, surveys, test score analysis and other more typical measures, the primary appraisal of this program's effectiveness has been, "If you build it, do they come?" In other words, not only do gifted kids *choose* to take the classes, but their course participation increases over time. Logic suggests that, supported by assessments of student academic success, this is a realistic and economically viable indicator of a well-designed course programming model.

Secondary Course Differentiation Model

Background

As students ascend through their school and life experience, the breadth of their personal knowledge expands. In an attempt to address individual learning needs, differ-

entiation within course design as well as within individual classrooms is essential. Both for the students and teachers, cluster grouping is a tested example of a classroom differentiation strategy that works. Cluster grouping is recommended within the Secondary Course Differentiation Model described here.

Program Model Highlights

- As students reach the secondary level, classroom learning can be supported through total course differentiation. That is, multiple strands of the same subject-specific course — such as first year physics – are offered to students. In this model, the need for in-class differentiation on the part of the teacher is reduced and like-peer learning is supported.
- The focal point of this model embraces offering two or more simultaneous strands of same-subject courses. These courses have identical primary benchmarks and pacing. That is, the same principal topics are presented in the same sequence throughout the school year. Rigor and depth of study are varied to serve the evolving learning needs and aspirations of individual classroom student populations.
- With appropriate advising, students and their families select individual differentiated course options.
- When feasible (e.g., in the first two weeks of school and at the end of grading periods), "misplaced" students can move from one differentiated course to another. This takes place through a pre-established teacher-counselor-student criteria process.
- Appropriate state and national standards and benchmarks are honored. District professionals monitor educational trends and student progress to address specific curricular design requirements.
- Courses within specific paradigms are created to address student instructional, developmental and social backgrounds and interests. (The United States has the finest university system in the world. This is what they do!)
- Staff training is offered as needed. Time must be appropriated for curriculum training and development.
- This is not tracking. As long as graduation requirements are met, students are free to move to any course design they choose throughout their secondary experience.

What is a good gifted program design? "Well," says Dr. Virginia Burney, "it all depends."

At Stoughton High School in Stoughton, Wisconsin, a science program has been developed over the last 15 to 20 years that uses the following course differentiation model. During this time, the numbers of students – gifted and non-gifted alike – choosing to take science classes increased dramatically. Within a highly diverse student population, the total numbers of students attending the school has remained relatively constant. However, complemented by the addition of numerous rigorous and differentiated courses, the size of the science teaching staff has nearly doubled. Also, student achievement scores on selected standardized tests have increased within the sum of the student learning populations. ●

Resources

For more information, see the following:

National Association for Gifted Children (www.nagc.org) Position Statements - Grouping

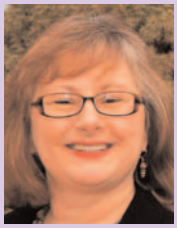
Rogers, K. B. (2007). Lessons learned about educating the gifted and talented: A synthesis of the research on educational practice. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 51(4), 382-396.

VanTassel-Baska, J., & Reis, S. (Fall 2004). Program Delivery Models for the Gifted. *Duke Gifted Letter*, 5(1).

Winebrenner, S., & Devlin, B. (2001). Cluster Grouping of Gifted Students: How to Provide Full-time Services on a Part-time Budget.

Winebrenner, S., & Brulles, D. (2008). *The Cluster Grouping Handbook: How to Challenge Gifted Students and Improve Achievement for All.* Free Spirit Publishing.

Virginia H. Burney, PhD *is a consultant for high ability education at Ball State University; she works with the Indiana Department of Education and also teaches graduate courses in educational psychology relating to gifted education. She has worked K through grade 12 as a principal, school counselor, guidance director, math teacher and school board member. Burney is a past president of the Indiana Association for the Gifted and served five years on the Board of the National Association for Gifted Children. She and her husband are the parents of three gifted children, now young adults.*



Cynthia Lardner, JD, MA, LLPC, *is a licensed counselor with a private counseling and consulting practice specializing in learning, giftedness, individuals with disabilities and gifted individuals with disabilities. Lardner lectures and conducts in-service training for educational institutions and professional organizations. Her article, Universal Design for Learning: Access for All, written with Linda Hannon, MA, can be found in the November/ December 2010 issue of* 2e Newsletter.

Jack Palmer, MS, *is the Northwestern University Midwest Academic Talent Search liaison in Wisconsin and a retired teacher and program administrator with 35 years of experience in public and private education. He has given numerous presentations at conferences and universities regarding secondary gifted education and has written multiple publications for educational and scientific journals. He is currently a consultant in the fields of secondary gifted and science education and a steering committee member for the National Association for Gifted Children Guidance and Counseling Division.*

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NEWS, DATES & OTHER IMPORTANT CTD INFORMATION

Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS), a great way to "jump start" the academic talent development of gifted students in grades 3 through 9 by enabling them to take EXPLORE, ACT and SAT years ahead of most other students.

Have fun this summer! And learn a lot, too. Three-week **Summer Program** Session 1 starts on June 26, 2011. Session 2 begins on July 17, 2011. Specifics including course descriptions, dates for all Summer Programs, and online registration are available on the CTD web site. *New This Year!* Afternoon Leapfrog courses and expanded all-day offerings in Chicago, Naperville and Palatine and a pre-session, four-day "week" of favorites at the Skokie site.

CivicWeek engages high school students in weeklong, career-focused service-learning immersion experiences in communities around the country each spring. Topics include Public Health, Law & Criminal Justice, Politics & Urban Development, and Education Policy & School Reform.

Civic Leadership Institute is a three-week summer service-learning program for high school students, held on top college campuses in Chicago, Baltimore and San Francisco.

Saturday Enrichment Program Spring session starts on April 9 in Evanston, Naperville, and Palatine, Illinois with a new site in downtown Chicago.

Gifted LearningLinks offers online courses for students in K through grade 12. Family Program (K through grade 2) begins on April 1 with Sports: It's a Numbers Game. Nine-week enrichment courses start on April 1 and June 15 for students in grades 3 through 8. One- and two-semester honors courses for students in grades 6 through 12 begin on the 15th of every month as do AP® courses for grades 9 through 12.

Accelerated Weekend Experiences for grades 5 through 8 take place in several locations in and out of Illinois. ●

For more information on any of these programs or offerings, go to the CTD web site, www.ctd.northwestern.edu, write us an e-mail at ctd@northwestern.edu or call us at 847/491-3782.

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Center for Talent Development (CTD) at Northwestern University is an accredited learning center and research facility serving precollegiate students. Since its inception in 1982, CTD has assisted more than 500,000 families through Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search and other programs. Offering a variety of learning alternatives for the gifted student, CTD provides school-year programs such as Saturday Enrichment Program, Gifted LearningLinks online learning, Civic Education Project, Project EXCITE and Project BLAST, as well as summer academic programs (Leapfrog, Spark, Solstice, Apogee, Spectrum and Equinox), informational conferences for families and educators, scholarships and graduate courses on gifted education. Led by nationally recognized scholar Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, PhD, CTD also conducts and publishes academic research on gifted students, particularly in the areas of accelerated learning and special populations of gifted learners. Center for Talent Development has been accredited as a nonpublic supplementary school by the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) since April 1, 1994. NCA CASI is recognized by the US Department of Education and has more than 100 years of experience in improving educational quality.

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