



NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

Fall 2011

Resources & ideas for parents & educators of gifted children

Talent

Center for
Talent
DEVELOPMENT®

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION & SOCIAL POLICY

Celebrating 30 Years 1982-2012

Embracing Talent Development: Then and Now

In the ever-evolving Center for Talent Development (CTD) story, fall 2011 marks several milestones.

- CTD celebrates three decades of excellent service.
- Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, CTD director, begins her presidency of the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC).
- CTD introduces courses in creative studies.

CTD talked with Olszewski-Kubilius about these important events and about the history and future of talent development and gifted education overall.



Then

Science course in a program offered by Midwest Talent Search, 1984

First, let's take a look back. How has gifted education changed in the last 30 years?

It has changed a lot, actually. The main difference is a paradigm shift toward 'talent development.' Instead of thinking of giftedness as an attribute based solely on intelligence, we now think of giftedness and talent as something that evolves over time and is more characteristic of people's behaviors and achievements than of the person. The CTD team was very forward-thinking in this regard, using talent development in its name right from the start, when we were established in 1982.

Another change is that we now think of giftedness not as a unitary thing, but as more domain-specific. So we talk about mathematically gifted kids, gifted writers or kids who are gifted in music or the arts. It's much more differentiated.

Why are these changes important?

Research has shown us that talent develops differently in different areas. So knowing

what children's strengths are helps us do a better job of directing them to appropriate schools, programs and services. Early readers, for example, are really good code breakers, and they tend to do well in music, computer programming and languages later on. Likewise, research has shown that kids who are mathematically talented and also have spatial ability are much more likely to become physicists and engineers and enjoy the physical sciences.

To be a high achiever in any field, however, requires more than just subject-matter talent. Gifted scientists have to be able to communicate their work and collaborate with others. Creative achievers, too, need a variety of skills to succeed. Schools like



Students in the Spark Program, Summer 2011

Now

"We now think of giftedness not as a unitary thing, but as more domain-specific."

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Juilliard recognize this and focus on teaching kids with musical talent, for example, to be performers – developing their musical ability *and* helping them deal with the anxiety that comes with auditioning, competing and performing. That is called psychosocial skill training, and we don't do that with academic talent. There are, however, people thinking and writing about that right now and how it applies to talent areas such as mathematics or creative writing.

We all know people who are really bright but not successful, and we ask ourselves, 'Why?' The answer, most often, is not a lack of intellectual ability. It's other things – like an inability to focus, to work with others or to maintain confidence after setbacks. I think the field is recognizing this and talking about what we can do – beyond providing challenging educational programs – to help individuals succeed. It's more of a whole-person focus.

What role has CTD played in moving the field forward?

CTD's primary function has been to provide excellent supplemental programs. I'm always surprised at how kids remember their CTD experience as a pivotal life event or epiphany because, for a lot of kids, our programs are like group therapy. It's the first time they can say, 'Oh, there are other kids like me. I'm not weird!' It makes them feel more normal, and it shores up their confidence to be themselves.

While it would be easy to stay in our



Now

Students studying nanotechnology in the Accelerated Weekend Experience, 2010

current programming niche, I believe CTD has also pushed the conversation among gifted educators to be about the broader issue of talent development. In our research, we have tried to understand the role of outside-of-school programming in the talent development process. We've tried to understand what supplemental programs have to offer children, what the benefits are and how to make them more available to a wider range of kids, particularly low-income children.

There are other centers like ours across the country, but I think the thing that

“When I speak, I always tell kids, ‘People who make it, who are famous, are not people who were always successful.’”

Center for Talent Development: 30 and Thriving

Center for Talent Development is proud to continue recognizing young scholars and encouraging their pursuit of knowledge. CTD has developed too, responding to innovative ideas, new technology, and the demand for more opportunities with more courses in more locations. Take a look back at the unfolding of our programs and the stewards of gifted education who have made it possible. A strong foundation promises a flourishing future. Happy Birthday, CTD!

Joyce VanTassel-Baska, CTD's founder and former director, congratulating recipients at the Midwest Academic Talent Search Award Ceremony, 1985



1982

Joyce VanTassel-Baska starts the **Midwest Talent Search Project** at Northwestern University. LetterLinks, a distance education program now known as Gifted LearningLinks, also begins.

30 YEAR BENCHMARK:

Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS) provides assessment and planning resources for over 25,000 gifted students annually.

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Then

American studies class greets Dean Clarence Ver Steeg, the author of their textbook and Dean of the Northwestern University Graduate School, Midwest Academic Talent Search Summer Program, 1984

distinguishes us is our combination of application and research. Whenever we do a program, whether it is grant-funded or targeted to a special population, we've tried to evaluate, examine and understand it in the larger context of the process of developing talent.

Talent development is clearly a priority, but what does it really mean? And how is it done?

CTD's commitment to talent development gets particularly embodied in the Summer

Program, which teaches kids not just about the subject they're studying, but also about facing challenges head-on and having self-confidence in different types of social environments. Going from being the top kid at your school to being with all top kids is not an easy thing to do. The Summer Program helps students deal with that effectively so that they have what it takes to do it again and again.

Too often, people get thwarted because they don't know how to deal with setbacks.

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Looking Back, Moving Forward

True productivity demands contemplation and planning. At CTD, we are gearing up for a new academic year and for our 30th anniversary in 2012. I am also beginning my



presidency of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). Both events prompt reflection, excitement and ambitious aspirations.

Recognizing the importance of our anniversary, in this issue of *Talent*, we pause to take a look back. I reflect on the last three decades and the direction in which we are heading. Four of my colleagues in the field describe CTD today and also comment on where we've been and how we've arrived at where we are.

For my part, I want CTD to play a role not just in our little corner of the world, but in moving the field of gifted education forward overall and in influencing schools and education generally. I'm hoping that one outcome of my NAGC presidency is a clearer vision of how CTD can be an even bigger, more effective advocate.

CTD's 30th anniversary is an opportune time to celebrate the growth and future of CTD. While this issue of *Talent* commemorates in particular the vision of CTD's earliest leaders, I would like to thank the many dedicated individuals who contributed excellent work over the past three decades. I am proud to continue the legacy by steering CTD onward and forward.

Paula Olszewski-Kubilius

Paula Olszewski-Kubilius
Director, Center for Talent Development

1983

The **Summer Program** and **Saturday Enrichment Program** are launched.

30 YEAR BENCHMARK:

More than 4,225 students enroll in CTD's 2011 Summer Program, 3,500 in the Saturday Enrichment Program.

1984

Northwestern University officially establishes **Center for Talent Development**.



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When I speak, I always tell kids, 'People who make it, who are famous, are not people who were always successful. They have just as many failures as successes; they just don't let the failures hold them back.'

Has anything remained the same throughout your years in gifted education?

I think one constant has been the belief that gifted kids need special services. The thinking behind this belief has changed, though. We used to assume that gifted kids were different as a result of their giftedness, but that hasn't really been supported by research.

Instead, it may be that gifted kids have special needs due to the value they place on excellence and high achievement or their attempts to take the road less traveled.

So the gifted girl interested in math and science may have special needs not because she is gifted but because it's hard to be gifted in math and science if you're a female in our society. This is a subtle, but important distinction. But whether you believe these kids have unique needs as a result of being gifted or as a result of striving for high achievement in a culture that doesn't support it, they still have special needs. Schools need to respond to those needs with different kinds of programs and services.

Looking ahead, what are your hopes for CTD?

By the time I retire, I'd love to see CTD



Now

Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search award recipients, 2010

endowed so that there is plenty of scholarship money for kids who need it. I also want CTD to expand into other areas of talent, which we are doing this fall by introducing creative arts programming. My primary goal, though, is that we continue to have this wonderful push and pull between research and practice, where we translate research into practice, and what we observe in practice informs our research.

What are your goals as NAGC president?

One of my goals is to ensure that we have a more national voice. The field of gifted

education has a lot to offer general education regarding ways to challenge children and methods of providing options and differentiated services. Unfortunately, we're not looked to for that advice or leadership.

We're not at the table for major educational discussions on the achievement gap, school reform or the U.S.'s standing internationally. Nobody interested in these issues is looking to us, and yet I think we have something to offer. Our practice and research tells us a lot about how to engage low-income learners or minority, under-represented learners, for example.



1987

Paula Olszewski-Kubilius becomes director of CTD and receives the Early Scholar Award from the National Association for Gifted Children.



1994

CTD receives accreditation from the **North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement.**

1996

CTD holds its first annual **Family Conference** with sessions and resources for gifted students and their parents.

30 YEAR BENCHMARK:

In 2011, 110 families attended the Family Conference held on the Northwestern University campus.

Additionally, there's recent research suggesting that some of the curricula and instructional practices promoted by gifted educators benefit all learners.

Why isn't NAGC currently at the table for today's major educational discussions?

I think one reason is because the perceptions of our field are based on the old paradigm of giftedness as a trait of an individual. People recoil against the argument that what are perceived as already-advantaged kids are more in need of services than other kids. It's an argument that falls flat. It angers people, so they don't want to hear from us. I think that, as a field, if we embraced the talent development perspective as our main construct, that would resonate more with general education and get us at the table.

What are some other challenges you face in achieving your goals?

I believe people within the field worry – and rightly so – that the field's core concepts will get fractured if we impart them to general education. Differentiation is a good example. We've been talking about differentiation for many years, and all of a sudden it's a big buzzword within general education. But what people say it is doesn't look anything like what we, as a field have developed or promoted, in many cases. My feeling is that is going to happen anyway with other core ideas in gifted

National Association for Gifted Children

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) leads in the support of gifted students, their parents and educators. Significant research drives NAGC's broad plan of action. Their systemic approach includes working with members of congress and providing a toolkit to help state and local advocates promote gifted education. NAGC also helps to advance the field by offering educators with classroom resources, webinars and opportunities for professional development. Parents and children seeking advice, opportunities, literature, and community networks enjoy the many free resources on their website, www.nagc.org.

Founded in 1954, NAGC has grown to over 8,000 members.

education unless we decide to get in there and lead the discussion.

I think the reason people are reluctant to embrace talent development is that the term itself often gets interpreted as, 'Everybody is talented or gifted in some way.' But that is not what we are talking about. We're talking about high level achievement and kids who are capable of it.

We're not talking about every child.

Every field I know, from chemistry to geography, wants movers and shakers, the best and brightest, coming into their field. They want to know how to find those people and how to cultivate them. That's what matters to them. And that's what our field should be about – being able to help them with that. ●

Advancing Potential and All That Jazz!

NAGC Annual Conference in New Orleans Nov. 3-6, 2011

Join CTD and experts from across the country to "jazz" about gifted education.

- Select from 350 content-rich sessions for educators, parents and advocates.
- Gain the latest information on current innovations and challenges.
- Meet Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, new NGCA president, at the Saturday night reception at Mardi Gras World.

1999

The **Civic Education Project** moves to CTD, encouraging gifted students to work toward solving social issues and explore careers in public service.

30 YEAR BENCHMARK:

Over 500 students from across the nation participate in Civic Education Project programs each year.



2001

CTD launches **Project EXCITE** to boost minority students' performance in science and math.

30 YEAR BENCHMARK: More than 150 young students, grades 3 – 8, currently participate in Project EXCITE.



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The Essence of CTD

Being able to craft memorable, short and sweet phrases is valuable in this electronic age. Reflecting on Center for Talent Development and its upcoming 30th anniversary, we posed this challenge to four people involved with the evolution of CTD: "How would you characterize CTD today using just a word or phrase?"

**“Kids win!
Kids win!
Kids win!”**

—Roxie Smith, vice provost at Columbia University in the City of New York

In this paraphrase of a famous Chicagoan (the late Harry Caray, long-time Chicago Cubs announcer), Smith expresses her admiration for the work that CTD is doing.

Smith, who was associate dean for academic affairs at Northwestern University's School of Education and Social Policy when CTD was established, says the Center fit nicely into the school's definition of education and conceptualization of how children and youth are socialized.

"Then, as now, we all recognized that schools simply don't have the resources to do everything," Smith says. "As with any new endeavor, we had high hopes for CTD from the outset. Joyce VanTassel-Baska, CTD's founder, was a well-known educator in the field of gifted education, and she brought that knowledge and experience to the project. It was her vision that gave it shape. Paula Olszewski-Kubilius was a brand-new PhD at the time, with energy and ideas, and together they made a dynamite team."

Smith adds, "I think it's fair to say,



though, that in those early days we never imagined it would grow to the size that it has, nor did we have any appreciation for the magnitude of impact it would come to have on the field."

“Synergistic.”

—Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Smith professor emerita and founding director of The Center for Gifted Education, College of William and Mary

VanTassel-Baska, CTD's founder, chose synergistic because, she says, "I think that the various facets of the Center all feed on one another in a positive and productive way, making the whole greater than the sum of its parts."

In describing CTD's impact on the gifted community, VanTassel-Baska says, "I think the Center has made major contributions to research

and development in the field of gifted education, especially with respect to what constitutes quality programs for highly gifted students.

"The research on gifted students in poverty has been steady and groundbreaking in examining psychological and educational variables that need attention in order to support these students' success in education and their future careers. Also, the Center has been successful beyond compare in receiving grants and contracts to further the mission of research and service for gifted students nationally and in the Midwest."

VanTassel-Baska is pleased with the Center's success. "I am most proud," she says, "of the development of a center that has longevity, continued growth in areas of importance to the field of gifted education and dynamism in identification, programming and preparation of teachers and other professionals for careers in the field."

→ **2002**

CTD'S Gifted LearningLinks completes the transition from LetterLinks mail correspondence to online courses.

30 YEAR BENCHMARK: 1,700 students benefit from CTD online courses annually.



2011

Center for Talent Development director, Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, begins term as president of the **National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC).**

2012

CTD celebrates its **30 year anniversary.**



“Energizing.”

—Coleen Coleman, associate dean,
Northwestern University School of
Education and Social Policy

“In the past 20 years, the growth of CTD programs has been really exciting to witness and support,” says Coleman. “Not only is CTD serving multitudes more kids and families, but doing so through such a variety of options – addressing different learning needs and preferences – that it’s really something we are all very proud of in the School of Education and Social Policy.”

Coleman believes that CTD “walks the walk” with regard to the School of Education and Social Policy’s mission.

On the leadership of Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, Coleman notes, “I don’t know anyone more devoted to the development of gifted kids. We’ve had countless conversations about her goals, hopes and dreams for the Center and for the kids and families it serves,” Coleman says. “Paula is energetic and she pushes through all obstacles.”

“On a personal note,” adds Coleman, “I’ve applied invaluable lessons learned from working closely with the great people within CTD to my experiences as a parent and an advocate for my kids.”

“It’s cool to be smart!”

—Linda Levine, instructor in the Summer Program at Center for Talent Development

“Students learn important lessons beyond just the subject matter. They meet gifted peers and discover that they are not alone.” ●

What word or phrase would you use to describe Center for Talent Development, and why? Be dramatic, funny, poetic or practical, and concise! Send us a Tweet or submit responses, such as a memorable moment or specific examples of CTD’s impact on you or others, to ctd@northwestern.edu for a chance to be featured in an upcoming newsletter or on the Talent Talk blog. We look forward to hearing from you—our exceptional students, parents, educators and friends!

Venture into the Visual

by Anne Hayden Stevens, creator and instructor of the Center for Talent Development’s Creative Studies Series.

Why are stop signs red?

How did writing develop?

What are “abstract” images?

Center for Talent Development programs are designed to expand thinking and encourage children to engage creatively with complex concepts. Gifted kids in particular are brimming with questions (and theories!) about how the world around them works.

CTD’s new Creative Studies classes address the questions children have about the visual world. We unpack the visual artifacts of a media-rich world, from picture books to the electromagnetic spectrum and explore how they impact everyday life.

The arts are an excellent context for investigating the endless range of possible solutions to a problem. Creative Studies in-class experiments are open-ended. Students frame problems for themselves and develop their own goals through discussion and trial and error. This approach nurtures self-sufficiency and a sense of creative authorship. Many problems in the adult world involve these sorts of challenges.

Our gifted children are the world’s future innovators. Creative Studies courses lay the groundwork for using visual language as part of their innovation toolkit.

Creative Studies are now offered as part of CTD’s Saturday Enrichment Program and online through the Gifted LearningLinks program. Check out current offerings on our website www.ctd.northwestern.edu. ●



Looking Forward

CTD 2012 Family Conference Saturday, June 23

CTD is so excited about the theme of next summer’s Opportunities for the Future conference we’re giving it a plug, even before winter sets in!

The 2012 family conference at Northwestern University will explore psychosocial aspects of talent development. We’ll welcome the dynamic team of Kristie Speirs Neumeister, Ph.D. and Ginny Burney, Ph.D., lead partners at Consultants for High Ability LLC. The duo will conduct multiple sessions to help parents understand the non-cognitive skills that gifted students need to handle the joys and challenges of high achievement – dealing with perfectionism, retaining confidence after setbacks, cultivating resilience and benefiting from competition.

The Opportunities for the Future conference is open to families of gifted children with sessions for adults and students in grades 4 through 12. Content is designed to help families make wise choices about educational paths and benefit from the numerous resources available. Much more information about the conference will be forthcoming, but mark you calendars now.

NEWS, DATES & OTHER IMPORTANT CTD INFORMATION

Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS) gives students in grades 3 through 9 access to tests ordinarily used for high school placement (EXPLORE®) and college entrance (ACT® & SAT®) to help them demonstrate their academic abilities. After testing, the NUMATS Toolbox provides extensive information and resources for families and educators. Online registration is available now. Visit www.ctd.northwestern.edu/numats to view the video "What is NUMATS," listen to recorded webinars and get your questions answered.

Gifted LearningLinks (GLL) nine-week winter session of online enrichment courses for students in kindergarten through grade 8 start again on January 15, 2012. Credit bearing honors, honors elective and AP® courses begin on the 15th of every month.

CivicWeek engages outstanding high school students in career-focused service-learning immersion experiences in communities across the country each spring. Dates, locations are online now and application material will be available in December.

Accelerated Weekend Experience (AWE) programs for students in grades 5 through 8 are taking place in several locations across the country this fall. Explore fascinating topics in science, technology or engineering with an expert in the field. Visit www.ctd.northwestern.edu/sep/program/awe/ for dates, sites and topics of these exciting two-day courses.

Saturday Enrichment Program (SEP) will fill your child's Saturdays with fun and excitement! Saturday Enrichment Program eight-week winter session begins on January 14, 2012 for students age 4 through grade 9. Locations: Evanston, Chicago, Naperville, and Palatine, Illinois.

Upcoming Gifted Conferences:

National Association for Gifted Children, November 3-6, 2011 in New Orleans. www.nagc.org

Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented, November 12, 2011 in Minneapolis. <http://mcgt.net/>

Educational Forum for Gifted Student Families, December 4, 2011 in Evanston on the Northwestern University campus. www.scholarsearchassoc.com

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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 U.S. Department of Education and has more than 100 years of experience in improving educational quality.



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