

## **Historical Perspective**

### **Gifted Challenge Grant**

#### **Florida Department of Education**

The first State Board Rule regarding gifted learners was adopted by the Florida Legislature in 1956. The Rule defined gifted learners in very broad terms: "One instructional unit may be allowed for service provided to children who are gifted, talented, and superior by a full-time, properly qualified person. Such a person will serve 15 to 30 children on a regular basis." Definitions of learners who are gifted have continued to be refined by the Florida Legislature.

Traditionally, the gifted are "those who have unusually high intellectual ability" (1962 Rule) and those who require "a special instructional program because of extraordinary learning ability or outstanding talent in the creative arts" (1970 Rule). The 1974 Rule states that the "mental development of a gifted student is greater than two (2) standard deviations above the mean."

According to the 1993 report on gifted education, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent*, gifted children are "children that have outstanding talent or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishments when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment."

Education for learners who are gifted has been included within exceptional student education by the Florida Legislature since 1968. In Florida, students are eligible for educational programs if they meet the criteria outlined in Florida Board of Education Rule 6A-6.030 19, FAC. These criteria focus on a learner's need for the gifted education program, entry academic skills, general intellectual functioning, and various behavioral and intellectual characteristics. Sid Parnes (1967) feels that before good solutions to problems are developed, many facts relating or contributing to the problem must be known. It is for this reason that the following text will provide an historical perspective and overview of four essential elements of the gifted program: of curriculum, personnel, communication among vested interest groups, and administrative structure from national, state, and local historical perspectives. This should provide the reader with the necessary background information about where gifted education has been, presently is, and may be in the future.

## **THE HISTORY OF GIFTED EDUCATION**

### **A National Perspective**

"Concern for the qualities of exceptional human beings arises out of an exceptional concern for the qualities of all human beings." (Gowan, Khatena, and Torrance, 1979). Lewis Terman, (1954), the father of gifted child research, referred to the discovery and encouragement of exceptional talent as follows:

To identify the internal and external factors that help or hinder the fruition of exceptional talent, and to measure the extent of their influences, are surely among the major problems of our times. These problems are not new; their existence has been recognized by countless men from Plato to Francis Galton. What is new is the general awareness of them caused by the manpower shortage of scientists, engineers, moral leaders, statesmen, scholars, and teachers that the country must have if it is to survive in a threatened world.

This quote is interesting when one considers that a mere three years later the national pride was stung by the launching of the Russian Sputnik I. Americans blamed the educational system. The reaction was, "How could this happen? Something must be done about our schools at once." Weaknesses in mathematics and science education

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were named as the chief culprits in the Americans' failure to match the Russians in space.

Thus began the formal disagreements among the experts in the field. The first arguments were those regarding "nature vs. nurture." Is high ability and intellect a function of good genetic breeding (theory of fixed intelligence) or can intellectual functioning be increased by environmental factors (interactive theory of intelligence)? Disagreements over the basic concept of who is gifted continue today. The definition passed by Congress in 1981 states that gifted and talented children are those "who give evidence of high performance capabilities in intellectual, creative, artistic areas, in leadership capability or specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities." (Section 582) More general definitions appear throughout the literature, like the one postulated by Witte (1940) as those "whose performance is consistently remarkable in any potentially valuable area" or by Renzulli (1978) who equates giftedness with creative/productive accomplishments and speaks of the necessary cluster of characteristics that define giftedness. Some have chosen to say they are the two percent who are predicted to score highest on a test of intelligence. Given the advances in brain research a new definition has evolved:

Giftedness is a biologically rooted concept, a label for a high level of intelligence that results from the advanced and accelerated integration of functions within the brain, including physical sensing, emotions, cognition and intuition. Such advanced and accelerated function may be expressed through abilities such as those involved in cognition, creativity, academic aptitude, leadership, or the visual and performing arts (Clark, 1983).

### **CURRICULUM**

Differing opinions regarding appropriate curriculum models, program organization and personnel arose from these different definitions. A curriculum designed for the academically talented student would surely differ from that of the program provisions for the student with high creative ability or leadership skills. Thus was born the acceleration vs. enrichment controversy. Is the most effective education for gifted students one of moving them at a faster pace through a particular body of knowledge? Or is it more effective to provide areas of learning not normally taught in the regular curriculum? These might include advertising, weather prediction, city redevelopment, future studies, etc. (Clark, 1983).

### **PERSONNEL**

Opinions on characteristics and educational background of successful, effective teachers of the gifted have been the topic of much discourse. Aspy (1969) suggests that the most important factor that counts more than any other is the teacher's self concept.

Gallagher, Ascher, and Jenne (1967) found that student success was directly related to the teacher's style, expectation, and response pattern. Some profess that teachers must be gifted themselves in order to teach the gifted. Others feel it is more important for teachers to understand the nature and needs of the gifted.

Surprisingly, few states have any requirements beyond the regular teaching credentials for teachers of the gifted. Few institutions, districts, or state departments of education provide preservice or inservice experiences in gifted education (Clark, 1983).

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**COMMUNICATION**

One of the first communication efforts related to gifted education was the 1958 National Education Association Invitational Conference on the Academically Talented Pupil. This conference marked the first time that most writers and leaders in the field of gifted had ever met. Eight thousand copies of conference reports were sold within three months. Based on the recommendations emanating from the conference a program funded by the Carnegie Corporation for assisting schools in strengthening curriculum for gifted was disseminated through NEA journals.

Cooperation in a joint curriculum development project with mathematics and science professionals was established. During the eleven years of this project, vital communication between scholars and the public was maintained.

The national trend in educating the gifted was enhanced by the 1971 report to the U.S. Congress by the then U.S. Commissioner of Education, S.P. Marland, Jr. on the status of gifted and talented in the U.S. (Marland, 1972). This report has been quoted time and again because of its significance in identifying the inadequate provisions and widespread misunderstanding found in the field of gifted education.

Results of the Marland study indicated that:

- There were at least 2.5 million gifted and talented school age students in the U.S.
- Only a small percentage of students were receiving any special education services
- Differential education for these students ranked low on federal, state, and most local levels of government and educational agencies' priorities.
- When unserved, these students do not and cannot excel
- Apathy and hostility among teachers, administrators, guidance counselors and psychologists made identification difficult.
- Lack of services resulted in psychological damage and permanent impairment of the agility of these students.
- The federal government had no role in the leadership or delivery of services for gifted individuals.
- Fewer than 2% of the identified gifted high school students were given an opportunity to work with specialists or in other school settings.
- No students were being served in 21 states.

One outcome of the report was the establishment of the U.S. Office of Gifted and Talented. Money was appropriated through that office to improve the quality of gifted programs.

In 1976 the Council for Exceptional Children conducted a national survey to identify current policies, resources and services in gifted education. CEC findings showed that, as a nation, we were improving.

Between 6% and 45% of the states' population were served, 84% of states had some type of written policy for servicing gifted.

- Only 4% of states had no state consultant.
- State funds accounted for 95% of the total amount expended on gifted programs.

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- One or more courses in gifted education were offered by 177 colleges in 45 states.
- State sponsored inservice was reported by 42 states. In an update of the 1976 CEC study, problems most frequently mentioned by the state directors were: lack of adequate funding, trained qualified teachers, and the need for development of a comprehensive K-12 program.

There are current efforts through the National Business Consortium, National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and CEC/TAG to lobby for legislation and to sponsor funding for projects that would benefit students. One such effort is the recent Javits Bill which provides federal competitive grants to school systems and universities to establish research, development, dissemination and identification projects for gifted and talented.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE**

During several periods of American history, programs for the gifted were encouraged. But organizing a program that delivers services to gifted learners has been one of the most complex endeavors in the history of gifted education. "The administrative structure is critical to the success of the gifted program. It will reflect the commitment of the school to either expand or inhibit the opportunities afforded to these able students" (Clark, 1983). Current research has shown that there are many different administrative arrangements being used throughout the country. In some places the gifted program is the responsibility of school principals. In others, a district administrator plans the overall program structure, interviews and recommends teachers, establishes identification and placement procedures, and maintains the budget for these programs. While Clark(1983) supports the district coordinator model as the means to ultimately insure consistent quality programs for gifted, the current trends of school-based or site based management favor a closer locus of control by the principal. More research will be needed to determine whether district coordination or school based control of programs is most effective.

In fact, more empirical studies will need to be conducted before there is a definitive identification process, standardized curriculum, national agreement relative to teacher training and the most appropriate administrative structure in meeting the challenges presented by the diverse population labeled gifted.

### **A STATE PERSPECTIVE**

In testimony presented by Dr. Elinor Elfner, Bureau of Education for Exceptional Students (BEES) Representative to the National Commission on Excellence in Education, the major strengths of the gifted program in Florida were outlined. Florida has mandated service to gifted youngsters since 1974. Three basic principles necessary for quality and excellence in programs for the gifted were cited. First, there must be a strong foundation in the basic education program. Secondly, there must be state policies and standards to provide the necessary leadership for the development of program; at the local level. And thirdly, there must be special incentives to continue to work toward excellence.