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## Notes

This essay has been adapted from a chapter in the author's book, *Goodness Personified: The Emergence of Gifted Children* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1994).

# Talent Recognition and Development: Successor to Gifted Education

Donald J. Treffinger & John F. Feldhusen

Our charge from the editor for this special issue on "Critical Appraisals of the Field" was for contributors to "step outside their practice and take a constructive look at themselves, their profession, and their programs." In order to respond to this charge, we believe it is necessary to consider the emerging emphasis on talent identification and development in relation both to its role in the broad educational setting of today's (and tomorrow's) schools and to its origins in "gifted education."

Many writers have already proposed that gifted education and school improvement have important and valuable contributions to make to each other (e.g., J. F. Feldhusen, 1993; Gallagher, 1991; Renzulli, 1993; Renzulli & Reis, 1991; Tomlinson & Callahan, 1992; Treffinger, 1991a, 1993, in press). The 1993 United States Department of Education Report, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent*, posed the challenge succinctly:

> In today's climate of education reform, many questions about gifted and talented education remain to be answered. When school practice is being rethought and the norms of general education are changing, where does the education of children of outstanding talent fit? How do we raise the ceiling of educational accomplishment in our schools and provide appropriate opportunities for all? How can we use what we have learned about gifted education in the last 20 years to improve education for all youngsters and provide the caliber of schools we need for the future? (p. 25)

Feldhusen (1992) and Renzulli (1994) argued strongly for the important role of talent development in all schools. These views involve much more fundamental issues than simply using just another name

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*Journal for the Education of the Gifted*. Vol. 19, No. 2, 1996, pp. 181–193. 

for gifted; they herald a much more extensive paradigm shift (e.g., Treffinger, 1982, 1986; Treffinger & Renzulli, 1986; Treffinger & Sortore, 1992). The field has before it the outstanding opportunity to provide vigorous leadership for recognizing and developing a broad array of talents among many people.

The new talent orientation is consistent with the emerging conceptions of Bloom (1985); Gagné (1985); Gardner (1983); and Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen (1993). It represents a more diagnostic and developmental orientation to human abilities, rather than the global "g" orientation represented by the intelligence testing movement still so firmly entrenched in gifted education. It also represents a strong shift away from the limited academic-intellectual orientation of gifted education toward a recognition of the nature and importance of talents in the arts, vocational domains, and social-interpersonal areas of human activities. Finally, it represents a new educational orientation that is concerned with the development of talents at all levels of ability, not just the highest or most precocious levels.

Treffinger (1991b) and Treffinger and Sortore (1992) described changing views of the nature of giftedness, identification, and programming as a paradigm shift. Traditional approaches to gifted education have not dealt effectively with emerging concepts of the nature and nurture of many talents, and there has been little evidence to suggest that such traditional models have dealt effectively with many of the contemporary issues and reforms throughout education. We have proposed that new questions and challenges have emerged and that fundamentally new models are also emerging to address them. Treffinger (in press) argued, for example, that the shift to a talent development orientation is not simply a cosmetic change nor merely an effort to employ "more politically correct" terminology, although it has on occasion been so simplistically or superficially characterized. New approaches to talent identification and development do not involve the business-as-usual approaches to definitions, identification, or programming reissued with a new, more palatable set of labels. Rather, the trend towards a talent development approach represents a deep or fundamental new orientation concerning the nature, scope, and practice of our field. Thus, it involves challenges for growth and change in areas that are deeply embedded in the history and traditions of gifted education. It is a framework in which all educators and community members can find opportunities for involvement, support, and active participation.



## Talent Development and Its Predecessor: Gifted Education

Efforts to recognize and develop talents must also be examined in relation to our more specific historical, conceptual, and practical foundations in gifted education. The talent development perspective involves both an extension and a redefinition of three major sets of issues: the *nature* of "giftedness" or talents, *identification*, and *programming*.

### *The Nature of Giftedness or Talents*

A new conceptual framework for the field of gifted education has been emerging from many sources since the mid-1980s, including Feldhusen (1992, 1993, 1994) Gagné (1985), Renzulli (1993, 1994) and Treffinger (1986, 1991b; Treffinger & Sortore, 1992). Gagné proposed, for example, that the development of human abilities proceeds from several broad areas of giftedness (e.g., intellectual, creative, sensorimotor, socio-emotional) to increasingly more specific talents as a result of environmental experiences. Feldhusen (1992) presented a model for talent identification and development in education (TIDE) that also acknowledged underlying general abilities but emphasized emerging strengths and talents. This approach's focus on specific strengths and emerging potentials in particular talent areas, rather than on general giftedness, is both an extension and a redirection of current practice in the field of gifted education. It is an extension in that it builds on the fundamental commitment of gifted education to seek out and respond appropriately to high ability. It is a redirection of those efforts in that it calls for those efforts to address specific talent areas rather than some presumed generic "giftedness." By analogy, there may be limited value in knowing that a patient has cancer and far greater value in knowing what type and in what organs; so also we hold that there is little value in simply asserting that a child is "gifted" and much greater importance in knowing students' specific talent strengths (manifest or emerging).

Talent is potential for the development of competence or expertise across a broad range of human endeavors in which there are opportunities for meaningful and valuable expressions and productivity. Talents may involve many kinds of productivity: *personal* (as in the individual whose accomplishments in a talent or strength area provide personal satisfaction and fulfillment), *avocational* (as in the case of a person, for example, whose talent is expressed productively through community theater productions or hobby and craft fairs or

shows), or *career-related* (in which the talent area becomes the primary focus of the person's work). Some youth show their potential for high-level expertise early, generally through precocious behavior and successful performance in a talent domain. Children who learn to read early and show high-level enthusiasm for good literature, for example, may demonstrate talent promise in fiction writing, poetry, or drama. Others who master arithmetic operations and demonstrate excellent mathematical reasoning ability early may express talent potential in the domains of statistics, mathematics, or computer science.

Feldhusen (1992) proposed four basic domains of talent that schools can address:

- *academic*—science, mathematics, English, social studies, foreign language,
- *artistic*—music, drama, art,
- *vocational*—business, agriculture, home economics, trade-industrial, and
- *personal-social*—leadership, care giving, teaching, sales.

Assessment of these talent domains can be based on achievement and aptitude tests, rating scales, auditions, product samples, and portfolios. Assessment of specific talents should be an ongoing process throughout youth and early adulthood, having the twin goals of clarifying already-recognized talents and discovering new ones. The best assessments of talent are very likely to occur within real learning contexts in learning experiences in the talent domains.

The trend towards talent development involves the important but challenging realization that the use of the term "gifted" as a specific category or type of child is untenable or indefensible. It also redefines our traditional views of gifted education in recognizing the problems of labeling children as gifted. Our abilities are not truly gifts. While some children seem to be endowed with higher potential, it is only through nurturance from family and in school, along with substantial effort from the child, that talents emerge, develop, and grow. It is probably desirable, then, that schools abandon entirely the concept "gifted" and focus instead on the identification and development of talent in all youth, with appropriate attention to varied levels and domains of talent potential in youth and the provision of individualized services to meet their needs. Dweck (1986) has shown that youth who see their abilities as incremental or to be developed rather than as an entity are more effective learners. Such an incremental conception of ability is fundamental in our understanding of human growth. Thus, we agree with the assertion in the publication, *National Excellence, A Case for Developing America's Talent* (1993) that "[t]he term 'gifted' connotes a mature power rather than a developing ability and, therefore, is antithetical to recent research findings about children" (p. 26). As educators, our task is not to identify and tell youth that they are (or are not) "gifted." It is, instead, to help them discover emerging talent strengths and help them develop their talents.



Given the breadth or diversity and the contextualization of talents or aptitudes, the TIDE challenge is richer and more dynamic but also much more complex. It is now time to move beyond a conception of giftedness that focuses only on a specific set of aptitude factors that are presumed to exist entirely within the head or mind of the individual. In many important ways, talents arise from many social, cultural, or circumstantial (or climate) factors outside the person's internal, testable, cognitive abilities. Talented performances over extended periods of time are also influenced by the same factors. In the past, these factors were too easily dismissed as "noise" or "error variance"; but we are now aware that they may influence the definition, development, and expression of talents in profoundly important ways.

### *Identification*

The traditional conception of identification in gifted education is a process of finding the few who have *it* ("You are gifted!") and rejecting those who do *not* have *it* ("You are not gifted!"). This psychometrically naive conception of human abilities has dominated practice for many years. In addition to its failure to recognize that all human abilities are continuous variables and that cutting levels are relatively arbitrary definers of giftedness, the traditional approach to identification also carries the liability of communicating to many children that they do not have *it*. This message must surely induce undesirable expectations of self in the rejectees. To the chosen ones, the gifted few, identification as gifted communicates the message that they have an ability—an entity, not that their strength or ability is something to be developed incrementally. As noted earlier, Dweck (1986) demonstrated that children who develop the entity orientation are likely to be less effective learners than those who recognize their abilities as something to be developed with their own efforts.

Identification should be viewed as a flexible, on-going diagnostic process applicable to all children and as an effort to *find* talent

strengths or potentials. Special techniques are indeed needed to diagnose high levels of talent that are present in some children, and there are relatively unique educational services that are appropriate to meet the needs of youth with high levels of talent. Far better educational experiences can be provided when we know the specific talents and needs than if we presume all members of some generic "gifted" category to have the same needs. The school experiences of all youth can be enhanced greatly, and all youth can develop far better senses of self-efficacy when they have opportunities for appropriate and challenging instruction within the domains of their talent strengths. There surely are basics in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and other subjects that all children should have a chance to master; but there is also great need to have positive learning experiences in their areas of talent strength, be it art, drama, music, industrial arts, technology, invention, home economics, photography, philately, social or behavioral sciences, humanities or philosophy, math and science, foreign languages, or athletics.

Identification, thus, must become a process of searching for talents in youth as a prelude to the provision of appropriate educational services. It is also critical that the burden of the identification process shift to students so that they can understand increasingly well their own talent potentials and formulate their own goals for the development of those talents. In this way, identification can become a process involving students in the diagnostic process of seeing and understanding their own strengths, talents, and sustained interests. Identification must also be seen as a continuous process, not a one-shot matrix telling once and for all time if the child is "gifted" or not. Talents emerge and grow developmentally, and for some they do not emerge because there is no stimulation at school or home. It is imperative that all who work with youth see talents and strengths as nurturable and emergent rather than as fixed and immutable.

These shifts are leading researchers and practitioners towards profiling as an identification model, and thus, defining and using Talent Profiles. This perspective extends the traditional gifted emphasis on "multiple criteria" and focuses it as well since we view profiles as dynamic, task- (or talent domain-) specific, and inclusive of many contextual variables rather than merely as a composite index based on several test scores or rating scales (e.g., Isaksen, Puccio, & Treffinger, 1993; Treffinger & Cross, 1994).



*Effective Programming*

In addition to stimulating new dialogue about the nature and breadth of talents and the breadth and focus of identification efforts, talent development approaches are also challenging gifted education to explore new and more varied approaches to programming.

Once we know specific talents and aptitudes, we can focus educational services and interventions more accurately on them. We can tailor educational services to be appropriate for the type of talent identified and for the students' unique learning characteristics. Emerging evidence seems to indicate that specific interventions are far more effective than general *gifted treatments*. The latter often take the form of pullout enrichment programs featuring thinking skills and project activity; these are services that critics of gifted education have often indicted (with justification) as appropriate for all children, not just a small group labeled "the gifted." The talent development model leads us to design specific interventions. These might include, for example: a journalism class for children who have shown writing talent, a leadership course for children who exhibit leadership talent, a photography course for children with visual talent, or an advanced mathematics class for those with high potential or talent in quantitative areas.

The term "gifted program" has most often meant a narrowly defined curriculum experience of an hour or two, peripherally "enriching," not interfering with the regular curriculum, and following the tenets of one or another of the leading gurus of the field. We prefer the term "programming" to suggest a broad, rich array of services that might be provided: by different instructors or leaders (from within or without the school); in varying ways, places, and times; and for varying individuals or groups of students. The selection of experiences or services should be guided by the student's profile of talents and identified needs. Many of these services either are already available in the general educational program or can readily be created. They also vary considerably in relation to time, resources, and cost. With any community, programming for talent development should take into account the services that might be provided by cooperative or collaborative efforts among several schools or districts; "outreach" involvement with community agencies (e.g., higher education, museums and galleries, other youth service organizations); community leaders, businesses, and parents; and the staff and students within any school. Thus, a substantial range of activities should exist, cre-

Table 1
**Curriculum Guideposts for Talent Development and Productive Thinking**

1. Build student knowledge bases (information, concepts, themes, etc.) to the highest or most advanced levels appropriate for their age, achievement levels, and grade.
2. Teach the structure of, and methods for, productive thinking.
3. Teach methods for research, inquiry, question asking, and independent study.
4. Teach methods for self-direction and control of learning (metacognition).
5. Provide learning experiences in curricular areas related to student talents, interests, and learning styles.
6. Provide curriculum experiences within or out of school that have authentic relationships to real-life experiences, careers, and applications.
7. Teach methods for and encourage self-appraisal and reflection in learning.
8. Incorporate issues, controversies, and problems that are unresolved, ambiguous, and indefinite.
9. Organize and synthesize learning experiences so that students can recognize, create, and work with themes and patterns.

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ating an array of options that can be used selectively to respond to the strengths and talents of individual students.

Contemporary approaches to talent development propose that we assume a dual role: that of responding appropriately (and flexibly) to the needs of students who already demonstrate very high levels of accomplishment in specific talent areas *and* initiating deliberate educational activities to seek and nurture the talents of all students.

Schools can begin to adopt the new approaches to talent identification and development by training all teachers in the techniques of individualized instruction (Dunn, Dunn, & Treffinger, 1992; H. J. Feldhusen, 1993). They can also provide a variety of curricular and extracurricular experiences that give students opportunities to explore and experience their own emerging talents. After school, Saturday, and summer programs; academic competitions; and commu-



Table 2
**Instructional Guideposts for Talent Development and Productive Thinking**

1. Offer varied instructional modes that allow different learning styles to be recognized and used.
2. Encourage self-regulated, self-monitoring, and self-directed learning.
3. Set high standards and expectations for student performance and products.
4. Provide for active cognitive involvement of students in learning situations.
5. Provide time and opportunities for student reflection about and discussion of their learning experiences.
6. Use varied instructional arrangements (whole class, small groups, and individual) and activities as appropriate for the objectives.
7. Provide question-asking, research, inquiry, and independent-study opportunities.
8. Create and maintain learning environments that provide both order and freedom and encourage productive thinking and learning.
9. Engage and challenge students at all levels of productive thinking at the highest and most complex levels as their readiness emerges.
10. Strive to evoke student passion and engagement in the learning process.
11. Provide opportunities for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and for cooperation, collaboration, and appropriate competition in learning.
12. Use varied media, resources, and technologies in carrying out instruction.
13. Provide opportunities for students to use what they have previously learned in new situations.
14. Provide leadership and facilitation to respond to students' varied talents and interests.

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nity resource and mentoring programs all offer rich opportunities for children and youth to test their emerging strengths, sustained interests, and talents and to grow in their areas of strength. Schools can also give renewed attention to both curricular and instructional principles and practices that foster productive thinking and talent development. We have developed two interrelated sets of "guideposts," one for curriculum and the other for instruction, for promoting productive thinking and talent development (Treffinger & Feldhusen, in press); these are presented in Tables 1 and 2 respectively. Finally, schools can give deliberate attention and effort to recognizing and nurturing talents and strengths in their long-range planning, restructuring, or school improvement initiatives.

*Summary*

New TIDE (talent identification and development in education) approaches are stimulating many in gifted education to shift their focus from defining, selecting, and serving "the gifted few" toward identifying and nurturing many talents and strengths in all students. These changes are being explored today as an outgrowth of advances in theory and research in education, developmental psychology, and cognitive science. They appear also to have considerable promise for creating a new and inviting foundation for constructive dialogue and synthesis with researchers and practitioners throughout education.

## The Path Ahead

Where does the field need to go? What further work needs to be done to effect a transition and commitment to a broader, richer, and more powerful paradigm of talent identification and development? Much research and extensive developmental work is still needed before these questions can be answered in fully satisfactory ways. The challenge, for the greatest part, still lies before us. Nonetheless, a few important implications can already be outlined; we believe that these issues have not been (and probably cannot be) dealt with effectively by traditional gifted program orientations. We propose that a talent development orientation will enable us to address them in powerful and rewarding ways:

1. We need to enter into a new and stronger relationship with regular education. We cannot assume that we will dictate the terms of that relationship, nor control its course, nor predefine what we will get from it. We will not be able to go into such a relationship simply to "correct them and shake them by the throat until they get it right." It might be argued that we need a new covenant for talent development in education, which will require dialogue and two-way communication (perhaps any communication except delivering monologues at each other!). Many educators will need to join together, seeking a common sense of purpose (a strong sense of vision and mission, not just a few sentences of platitudes). Commitment to finding and nurturing talents, at all ages from early childhood through adults, can bring new vigor and excitement to redefining the fundamental goals and purposes of education; working together, we may all be able "to get it right."

2. New paradigms will compel us to involve our entire community more widely and more effectively in searching for talents (in students and in adults) and in creating talent development opportunities in and out of schools. Learning that incorporates talent development necessarily draws students and teachers out of the confines of schools and classrooms and into the real world where talents are expressed and used every day.

3. We need to work towards a richer process of understanding students in which attention is given to seeking potentials and designing opportunities to help talents come out of hiding, flourish, and be valued. In these efforts, we will learn to appreciate many talents now disregarded and discover that building on strengths creates a foundation for successful learning and productivity that is more powerful than focusing on weaknesses, deficiencies, and limitations.

4. There should be new efforts to effect changes in policies and legislation at the local and state levels that support a more contemporary talent identification and development approach. This may be difficult to do when there are many who hold tightly to old views (especially in relation to identifying and labeling students that some advocates seem to value so highly); old paradigms can be stubbornly persistent.

5. For several years ahead, the path will be thick, deep, thorny, and often nearly impossible to see, especially for practitioners at the local level who will feel caught between old ideas and policies and promising new views. The pioneers who move forward now, despite formidable risks, may share greatly in the eventual rewards and satisfactions that arise from new efforts to recognize and nurture talents.

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