

Some Historical Perspective

Talent development has been an important concept for many leaders in the field including John Feldhusen, Don Treffinger, Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Carolyn Callahan, Tracy Cross, Larry Coleman and others who have written and talked about it extensively. The field has been exploring talent development as a critical approach to the education of high-ability individuals for more than 25 years.

Talent development as a practice is already embodied in our current Pre-K Grade 12 Gifted Education Programming Standards. It is currently reflected in a variety of program models being implemented within gifted centers and school districts all across the country.

For example, for the last 12 years, I have been running a program called Project Excite whose goal is to prepare talented under-represented minority students to qualify for honors classes in math and science when they enter high school. We identify children with potential by virtue of the fact that they are the highest scoring students in their schools in the third grade on tests such as the Naglieri and the ITBS. However, none of these students would have been identified for a traditional gifted program that used high scores on ability or achievement tests for selection. At this point in their lives, the students have potential, but that is not demonstrated in high test scores or high achievement. Through involvement in enrichment and accelerated gifted programs over the course of a few years, most qualify for advanced course placement in grade nine (into honors classes) and most have completed one or two years of high school math by grade 9. It's very exciting, and rewarding, to help students move from high potential to high achievement.

At the same time, I have run programs for highly gifted children for 28 years--kids who are in the top 1% in terms of their math and/or verbal ability. They participate in supplemental enrichment and/or accelerated coursework through the summer and via distance learning programs. Many work three to four years above grade level in their areas of strength and these students love coming together in summer programs for challenging classes and social support from other students.

These two different programs, one for students with academic potential and one for students who demonstrate giftedness on traditional measures, are both talent development programs. Both use identification protocols, both provide special classes and services, and both use strategies such as enrichment and acceleration. They mirror the variety of programming that is encompassed well by the framework of talent development and demonstrate how our field embraces the needs of a diverse group of high-ability children.

Talent development, as a concept or a practice, does not exclude nor diminish services for gifted children. Rather, talent development expands our services and programming to support a range of high-ability learners with different needs.

A Political Perspective

For the last 20 years, [the Javits Act](#) was the only federal funding that our field has received and was limited in focus to identifying and serving under-represented gifted children. Talent

development strategies, such as Project Excite and others, offer a productive framework for continued support for our work and services, both as they currently exist and can grow in the future. Finding and supporting youngsters with a wide range of talents is a goal many policy makers can support. Among other things, [NAGC seeks to share program and service models](#) that will serve all high-potential students who can benefit from our best practices. The goal is achieving an optimal match between the gifted students, their needs and characteristics, and the program and services provided.

One of the most valuable aspects of the work being done in programs like Project Excite and in research studies by Joyce [VanTassel-Baska](#) and Sally [Reis](#) with diverse gifted students is their implications for the broader field of education--regarding what works to raise achievement and how to better identify hidden talents and potential among children. For the good of society, this work needs to be shared with the larger education community so that schools can improve and more students can develop their potential. NAGC's [mission](#) is, in part, to support and engage in research and development, professional development, advocacy, and collaboration with other organizations and agencies that strive to improve the quality of education for all students.

Why should we hide our light under a bushel so to speak when we are discovering new knowledge that can help others as well as improve services for gifted children?

In the past few years, we have lost all of our federal funding for gifted education research and 14 states have reduced their funding of gifted programs. Our own newly released [State of the States in Gifted Education](#) report shows that currently most gifted children are served in regular classrooms by teachers with little or no training in gifted education. If we are to stop this downward trend for our field we need more advocates for gifted children. Talent development conversations give us a bridge to general education that will yield more advocates and supporters in schools and ultimately improve education for gifted learners. With a focus on identifying and nurturing a range of gifted students, including traditionally under-served gifted students, it resonates with policy makers whose support we need to fund gifted programs and services.

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