

Individuals with Exceptional abilities

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March 11, 2012

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For Counseling Individuals with Diverse Needs

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**Individuals with Exceptional Ability**

**Overview:**

The 10% individuals of the entire population that falls on the extreme right side of the curve in measure of their ability also requires special attention in the field of education and schooling. These micro- and meso- environments interacts with their higher than average ability and unique personality traits in order to determine the individuals’ talent output. Just like individuals on the extreme left, these individuals also require extra support and individual learning environment for their work to reach full potential. These individuals in schools are referred to as Talented and Gifted individuals or Exceptional children. According to National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), “*Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports). The development of ability or talent is a lifelong process. It can be evident in young children as exceptional performance on tests and/or other measures of ability or as a rapid rate of learning, compared to other students of the same age, or in actual achievement in a domain. As individuals mature through childhood to adolescence, however, achievement and high levels of motivation in the domain become the primary characteristics of their giftedness. Various factors can either enhance or inhibit the development and expression of abilities."*

Thus, NAGC does not limit their definition towards any one kind of ability or potential either measured by an IQ test or performance. It tries to cover a broad spectrum not necessarily measured by an IQ or an achievement test to allow optimal educational experiences to as many students as require. This results in the natural talent to flourish to help the individual as well as the community.

According to United States federal definition of gifted and talented students: “*Gifted and Talented means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities*.” (P.L. 103–382, Title XIV, p. 388) So, this not only defines what it is to be Gifted and Talented but also highlights their need to have a tailored environment that meets their needs.

Finally, Oregon state defines “*Talented and Gifted children means those children who require special educational programs or services, or both, beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society and who demonstrate outstanding ability or potential in one or more of the following areas:*

* *General intellectual ability as commonly measured by measures of intelligence and aptitude.*
* *Unusual academic ability in one or more academic areas.*
* *Creative ability in using original or nontraditional methods in thinking and producing.*
* *Leadership ability in motivating the performance of others either in educational or non-educational settings.*
* *Ability in the visual or performing arts, such as dance, music or art.”*

Source: Oregon Revised Statutes: 343.391 to 343.413

In all these definitions it seems very important to identify these individuals who are gifted in different domains and who have the potential to bring out talented behavior. According to Gagne’s metric based system of levels within gifted/talented population, we can adopt a metric system where 10% of the top individuals are mildly gifted, top 10% of the mild group are moderately gifted and so on highly and exceptionally gifted. If we need to have some uniformity we need to adopt such a system. However, in United States, it is left at the states and local levels to define and interpret the gifted and talented. Oregon is one of the five states in US that has mandate identification and response to TAG students. Ironically, it is a non-funded mandate and in practice the focus is more specific to math and reading scores. In Oregon, identification as a Talented and Gifted (TAG) student “means the student has scored at the 97th percentile or above on a nationally normed test and, the district has gathered a body of evidence to support identification as a TAG student.” (Oregon Department of Education, ODE). Also, Oregon schools may identify students based non-academic areas which is not usual.

In Oregon, approximately 7.3% of students 42,375 are identified as TAG. TAG funding from the state legislature and the ODE has been at a very very low level. It currently amounts to about $2.50 per such student per year. Current funds supports only one full time ODE TAG specialist and one-half FTE administrative support for the entire state. The demographic data of Oregon is shown below. There is a slight difference in the male-female data. However, the data based on racial/ ethnic diversity and economically disadvantaged groups shows wide range of discrepancy. On the other hand, no federal agency or organization collects these students’ statistics; there is not federal funding directly for these students and NCLB also does not support this side of the curve. It is estimated that there are three million children with gifts and talents in the United States whose unique educational needs go largely unaddressed.

Culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse (CLED) & high poverty students continue to be over identified for remedial classes and underrepresented in gifted and talented (GT) programs and services (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

National surveys indicate that only 10% of those students performing at the highest levels are CLED students, even though they represent 33% of the school population (Gallagher, 2002).

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Students in subgroup** | **Students identified as TAG** | **Percent of TAG students belonging to this subgroup** | **Percent of All students belonging to this subgroup** |
| **Total** | 553,279 | 40,375 | 100% | 100% |
| **Gender** |  |  |  |  |
| **Female** | 269,149 | 18,921 | 46.86% | 48.65% |
| **Male** | 284,130 | 21,454 | 53.14% | 51.35% |
| **Race/Ethnicity** |  |  |  |  |
| **White (non-Hispanic)** | 361,083 | 30,113 | 74.58% | 65.26% |
| **Multiracial (non-Hispanic)** | 26,416 | 2,341 | 5.80% | 4.77% |
| **Black/African American (non-Hispanic)** | 13,900 | 518 | 1.28% | 2.51% |
| **Hispanic** | 116,391 | 3,406 | 8.44% | 21.04% |
| **American Indian/ Alaskan Native (non-Hispanic)** | 9,774 | 291 | 0.72% | 1.77% |
| **Pacific Islander (non-Hispanic)** | 3,662 | 123 | 0.30% | 0.66% |
| **Asian (non-Hispanic)** | 22,053 | 3,583 | 8.87% | 3.99% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Economically Disadvantaged** | 291,905 | 9,736 | 24.11% | 52.76% |
| **Not Economically Disadvantaged** | 261,374 | 30,639 | 75.89% | 47.24% |

Oregon State Report Card, 2011-2012 School Year, ODE

Not only those differences but we are also not aware of national studies of the incidence of artistic talent in the student population, the number of gifted and talented student increases, depending on the number of categories of giftedness used in the estimate.

**Impact on Educational Pursuits/ Academics**

The intellectual or cognitive development of gifted and talented children often progresses more rapidly than their social, emotional, and physical development, a phenomenon called asynchrony (Silverman, 2002). This uneven development may create a backdrop for vulnerabilities to surface when gifted children are compared with or provided the same services as their chronological peers.

Gifted children with these characteristics may pursue interests more typical of adults, or with a passion that is more mature than typical of children their age. Feeling "out of synch" or having an intense interest in something out of the ordinary makes it difficult for some gifted children and youth to fit in with their school peers. They may feel pressure, internal and external, to conform, yet at the same time, they feel pressured to excel academically.

Ten themes emerged from the analyses of in-depth research study conducted on 14 individuals dropped out from high school and identified gifted (Hansen & Toso, 2007)

1. Problems began in elementary school
2. High sensitivity not acknowledged at school
3. Received no help with major losses (sickness, death, changing schools)
4. Lack of community; non-acceptance at school
5. Lack of respect from and for teachers, staff and students
6. Unchallenging and/or irrelevant curriculum
7. Issues with authority
8. No advocate to bring meaningful change
9. Mid to high levels of alcohol and drug use
10. Conflict with their parents or guardians in regard to school-related issues

**Personal. Social and Emotional Impact**

Most children experience similar difficulties in growing up, but gifted children and youth tend to experience more conflicts earlier, especially in school.

These conflicts are often due to the incongruities among their developing abilities, interests, environments, and social expectations (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997; Robinson, 2002) and can have a major impact on career and life development.

Also, due to ignorance among professionals about specific social and emotional characteristics of gifted children which are assumed as signs of pathology. The most common misdiagnoses are: ADHD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (OD), OCD, Anxiety and Mood Disorders.

Even in cases of correct diagnoses, giftedness is still a factor that must be consider in treatment and should generate a dual diagnosis.

Other factors such as personality traits and situational factors such as perfectionism, sensitivity, intensity, idealism, questioning the status-quo are necessary to consider.

**Career:**

Career counseling of GT must acknowledge the unique career and life development issues that may impact their career planning.

Common issues are multipotentiality, early emergence and foreclosure, personality traits, the overemphasis on academics, and the expectations of others. School counselors should consider adjusting the timing, pace, complexity, and intensity of career activities to suit the advanced cognitive levels and/or issues of gifted students.

Effective career counseling of gifted and talented students incorporates lifespan issues and helps them build satisfying lives by learning to balance multiple life roles.

**Action/Intervention**

**The Professional School Counselor’s role according to American School Counseling Association (ASCA) guides in the following way:**

1. Assisting in Identification:

Intellectual ability, Academic performance, Visual & performing arts ability, Practical arts ability, Creative-Thinking ability, Leadership potential, Parent, teacher & peer nomination, Expert evaluation (aka Multiple Intelligence Model – Howard Gardner)

1. Advocating
2. Assisting in promoting understanding and awareness of special issues of this group

Underachievement, Perfectionism, Depression, Stress management, dropping out, Delinquency, Difficulty in peer relationships, Career Development, Meeting expectation,

1. Goal setting
2. Providing Individual and Group counseling
3. Recommending material and resources in meeting their personal/social needs
4. Engaging in professional development activities
5. Collaborating with other school personnel

One of the qqualitative study investigated 25 programs nationally including site-visits of 7 programs for understanding increase participation of CLED and high-poverty students. These programs implemented several strategies in order to have an increase of CLED and high-poverty students in GT population (Briggs, Reis, Sullivan, 2008; National Association for Gifted children). They observed that certain interventions increased the likelihood of CLED and high-poverty students in identification and retention of gifted and talented programs.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Region** | **Program** | **Grade Level** | **Category** |
| Midwest | Rockwood Treasures | Elementary | Modified Identification |
| Midwest | Project Excite | Elementary | Front-loading |
| Northeast | Mentor Connection | Secondary | Curriculum changes |
| West Coast | Euclid High ability Magnet | Elementary | Curriculum changes |
| West Coast | Project College Bound | Secondary | Parent Connections |
| All regions | All Programs | K -12 | Program Evaluations |

Some of the other suggestions based on a synthesis of research on educational practices from 1861 to 2007 indicated the following aspects (Rogers, 2007):

* Gifted and Talented learners need daily challenge in their specific areas of talent
* Opportunities should be provided on a regular basis for gifted learners to be unique and to work independently in their areas of passion and talent
* Provide various forms of subject-based and grade-based acceleration to gifted learners as their educational needs require
* Provide opportunities for gifted learners to socialize and to learn with like-ability peers
* For specific curriculum areas, instructional delivery must be differentiated in pace, amount of review and practice, and organization of content presentation

**Resources:**

* For Parents & Teachers: <http://www.exquisite-minds.com/gifted-resources-lessons-and-curriculum/>
* Portland Public School <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/departments/tag/>
* National Association for Gifted children <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=546>
* The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) at University of Connecticut <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/>
* Oregon Association for Talented and Gifted <http://oatag.org/>
* Portland State University Pre-college program <http://www.pdx.edu/dmss/pre-college-programs>
* Oregon State University Pre-College Program <http://oregonstate.edu/precollege/>

**Empowering Youth**

Curtis, K. (2008). Empowering youth. Search Institute Press.

A hands-on guide to develop the best in young people. Each chapter delves into one of the four Empowerment Assets within Search Institutes's Developmental Assets framework. There are resources for working with kids of all ages.

**Gifts & Talents for Teenagers: Discovering your Unique Strengths**

Carter, C. (2007). Gifts & talents for teenagers: Discovering your unique strengths. Denver, CO: Lifebound.

This book will help teenagers identify what makes them unique, find interests that they are passionate about, discover more about themselves, their abilities, and their future, and to think about the role education plays in their career success. The book’s profile and introspective activities will help readers develop natural and useful ways to turn their potential into positive action for themselves and others.

**Special Populations in Gifted Education: Working with Diverse Gifted Learners**

Castellano, J. (2003). Special populations in gifted education: working with diverse gifted learners. Allyn and Bacon.

This text is intended to provide a desperately needed update reflecting the modern view of who the "special populations" are in gifted education. Today’s gifted students include a complex cross-section of students—from the gay/lesbian/bisexual student to the one who is dual-labeled, and from the biracial/bicultural to the indigenous. Topics include any combination of the following areas of interest: characteristics, curriculum, instruction, assessment and evaluation, nurturing, and meeting their social, emotional, academic, and cognitive needs.

**Teaching Young Gifted Children in the Regular Classroom**

Smutny, J.F., Walker, S.Y. & Meckstroth, E. A. (1997). Teaching young gifted children in the regular classroom. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

This book offers practical strategies and techniques concerning issues such as, identifying giftedness, recognizing and teaching to multiple intelligences, presenting the curriculum in a creative and challenging way and building a partnership with parents.

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