

Foreword

In 1993, I addressed the annual convention of the National Association for Gifted Children with a keynote address titled, “Our Gifted Children: Are They Asking Too Much?” The title of my remarks came from an entry in a student’s “thinking log”—a personal and reflective diary of ideas, concepts, and questions that captured each student’s “thinking about their own thinking.” The author was a 15-year-old, first-year student at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy in Aurora.

Her journal entry is as follows:

I wish I could still draw. When I was in grammar school, I used to draw pretty decently. I loved to draw in pencil and chalk. Art of all kinds intrigues me, but I also love music and painting and carpentry and metal working and dancing and sewing and embroidery and cooking. I want to dance in my old ballet class, play my clarinet, draw thousands of pictures—really good ones—create beautiful poems and pieces of woodwork, cook and sew for my children, decorate my home, have a good marriage, be an active volunteer, go to church, be an astrophysicist, go to Mars, and understand all my questions about life. Now, that’s not too much to ask, is it?

My remarks were structured around my response to her question and why my answer was, “No—it was *not* too much to ask.”

In countless speeches after that, I repeated her journal entry and its poignant question, “Is that too much to ask?” The response pattern was sobering and gradually quite predictable, and in itself is a compelling reason why this book had to be written. In audiences of adults, there was always laughter—as if to say, “What a naïve question. Of course it’s too much to ask and when you grow up and enter the real world, you will understand why.” In audiences of young people—high school and college age—there was silence. The question was neither naïve nor funny.

Although more than 15 years have passed since that convention (and manned space flight to Mars is now a possibility), the question remains a fundamental one, and scores of gifted students are still asking it and hoping we are on their side.

Programs and Services for Gifted Secondary Students is scholarly, engaging, and thoughtfully written by some of our nation’s most knowledgeable and respected practitioners, researchers, and policy leaders in gifted education. It provides a comprehensive survey of best policies and practices, yet wisely situates the imperative for meaningful multidimensional program and content differentiation in the context of advances in the learning sciences and the neuroplasticity revolution. We now know that thinking and learning can change the structure and function of the brain and alter its map. This has enormous implications for the learning environments that we create for our children—by design.

By presenting evidence and research-based practices, the mythologies traditionally surrounding the education of gifted children are eroded. The cognitive case is made that differentiated education for gifted students is *essential* to their development. Knowing this, our national policy toward gifted students cannot be “make it on your own.” Talent must be ignited, nurtured, and sustained *by design*, through wise, knowledge-based policies and innovative best practices. This book tells us why and shows us how.

To develop expertise and strategic thinking and to invite intellectual energy and creative power to flourish requires decidedly different learning environments. These personalized, curiosity-driven, and inquiry-based environments immerse gifted students in advanced, accelerated, challenging, and complex curriculum; problem solving; abstract conceptual thinking; multidisciplinary collaboration; experimentation; and the pursuit of meaningful questions that matter to them—and they do so by design.

In addition to artfully describing the attributes framing the design and map of optimal learning experiences for Gifted Secondary students, the book also:

- provides evidence-based descriptions and assessments of the current state of gifted secondary education, focusing on issues such as stress, peers, perfectionism and fear of failure, cultural diversity, gender differences, and twice-exceptional students;
- summarizes some current reform efforts, such as high school restructuring, competency-based promotion, and early- and middle-college programming and their impacts on gifted students;

- explores some national policy initiatives and programs, such as NAEP (what it can and cannot report about gifted students) and the Javits Grant Program;
- describes promising programmatic options and best practices, such as specialized magnet schools, early college entrance and talent search programs, school-to-work and study abroad opportunities, and distance education; and
- frames the context and content of an expanded multistakeholder national conversation on the education of gifted students at the secondary level.

Grounded in both pragmatism and possibility, the authors remind us that the future of gifted secondary education does not lie in increasing and scaling what we currently are doing. In the absence of systemic options, supplemental programs provide critical programming for gifted adolescents, but they are inadequate preparation for coherently and comprehensively developing their talents over time.

The future of gifted secondary education lies in a new vision. The vision offered in this book rests upon four major commitments:

1. formal identification of student abilities and talents based on a variety of information and evidence including grades, assessment of significant products, observation of behaviors, and students' disciplinary interests;
2. commitment to advance students based on their prior knowledge;
3. an openness and flexibility with respect to student placement—not a rigid adherence to require prerequisites if students are performing exceptionally well; and
4. programs that have adaptive and flexible structures, well-qualified personnel, and multiple opportunities for professional experiences, such as mentorships and internships.

This is a future vision framed by what we now know about human learning, grounded in the unique intellectual, social, and emotional needs of Gifted Secondary students and congruent with the policies and practices that can develop the remarkable potentials of our students. We shape the world from the inside-out. The nature and quality of our thinking shapes who we become, and who we become shapes the world. Mind-shaping is world-shaping. The future prosperity and sustainability of the global community rests on the development of talent and the igniting and nurturing of our children's ethical and creative minds. This is our work, it must be our commitment . . . and, it is not too much to ask.

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