

Identifying and Nurturing Exceptional Ability in Young Children: A Talent Development Approach

Susan Corwith, Ph.D., Assoc. Dir., Center for Talent Development, Northwestern University

Optimal Match

It is necessary to ensure that educators are able to recognize the learning and developmental differences of students in their classrooms and promote cognitive and affective growth commensurate with their abilities.



Essential Questions in Gifted Education

- Who/what are we identifying? (Students or students-for-services?)
- Why are we trying to do that?

Talent Development

Current Research Findings

(Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, Worrell)

- Specific abilities are better predictors of adult achievement than general ability
- Intelligence is malleable and increases with intervention
- Gifted children are as variable in personality characteristics as non gifted children

- Unique psychology of gifted children is not inherent in being gifted but due to interaction of gifted individual and environment
- Psychosocial skills are important determiners of achievement and these are also malleable and coachable
- Giftedness develops over time with support, opportunity and motivation
- Giftedness is not static but changes over time and with development

Talent Development Framework

- Emphasis on recognizing and nurturing talents
- A focus on domain-specific abilities (math, science, etc.)
- Ability as developmental
- Deliberate cultivation of noncognitive and psychosocial skills
- Learning and creative development occur inside and outside of school
- Goal of advanced education is to support creative productivity in adulthood

Early Childhood

Middle Childhood

Early
Adolescence

Late Adolescence

Emergent
Talent

Competency

Expertise

Early Childhood

Middle Childhood

Emergent Talent



Acquiring foundational knowledge and skills
Self-regulation of emotions, behavior,
attention
Developing interpersonal skills



Exposure to different talent areas via
enrichment: dabble and define interests



Exploration

Middle Childhood

Early
Adolescence

Competency

Build core academic skills and knowledge
Strategic use of learning strategies and meta-cognitive skills
Mindsets/self-beliefs that support achievement

Acceleration in areas of advanced competency
Continued exposure to potential areas of interest
via enrichment programs

Building Foundations

Early
Adolescence

Late Adolescence

Expertise



Deep knowledge and engagement in areas of talent/interest
Formation of an identity that includes talent domain



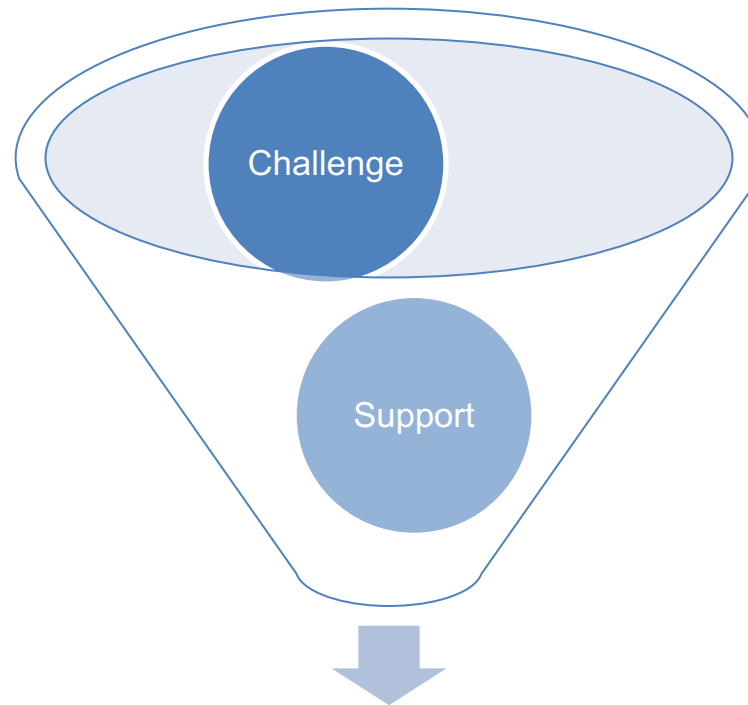
Advanced study in talent areas
Authentic work in talent domains guided by professionals
Exposure to career fields



Entry Into Professional & Creative Domain

Challenge:

- Advanced Enrichment
- Acceleration



Talent Development

Support:

Psychosocial Skill Development

- Self-confidence
- Mindsets
- Resilience
- Teachability

Critical Issues in Identification

Excellence Gaps

Under-identification of Talent

What is an excellence gap?

“Excellence gap” refers to the disparity in the percent of lower-income versus higher-income students who reach advanced levels of academic performance.

– Jack Kent Cooke Foundation website

Why are there excellence gaps?

- Unequal opportunity to learn (OTL)
 - fewer students from traditionally underrepresented groups are ready for advanced opportunities (lost potential) (Peters & Engerrand, 2016, Grissom & Redding, 2016)
 - In the US, poverty is associated with achievement disparities; if you cannot afford an opportunity, you don't get it.
- When students are ready for the opportunities, they aren't identified (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Hamilton et al., 2018; Siegle et al., 2018)
 - School identification is often done sparingly and inconsistently
- When students do need the services, their schools don't offer them

Identifying Talents Early

. . . the best way to identify gifted students . . . and to recognize and nurture the strengths of ALL students . . . is to provide them with very rich, challenging curriculum in their areas of strength and interest and see who responds like a gifted student.

What can we do?

Frontloading: Provide young children with early, rigorous, enrichment experiences

- Help them demonstrate what they know, understand, and are able to do
- Make them ready to be identified for and take advantage of advanced opportunities
- Enrichment, compacting, access with scaffolding, noncognitive skill development

What can we do?

- Identify a broad range of needs, interests, and levels of readiness.
 - Observation of learning
 - Universal screening, local norms
 - Open enrollment opportunities (after school, school breaks)
- Assess early, often, and with a range of tools

What can we do?

- Provide more rigor for students. Teach more students above “grade level”
 - Cluster grouping, differentiation, inquiry-based approaches, problem-based units in early childhood and elementary classrooms
 - Acceleration when necessary
 - Supplemental services for high achievers

Talent Development

- In early stages of talent development, gifted education programs should place greater emphasis on identifying potential, particularly with individuals who have had limited opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, or other characteristics used to determine gifted program eligibility.
- As children mature, the services they receive should be adjusted to provide a real-time match to their current levels of demonstrated need, gradually placing more emphasis on achievement and productivity within domains.

*NAGC Talent Development Task Force
Report to the Board of Directors (Besnoy, K.,
Drapeau, P., Felder, M., Horn, C., Krisel, S.,
Laing, P., McBee, M., Olszewski-Kubilius, P.,
Roberts, J., Subotnik, R., 2015)*

Programming for Talent Development (Pathways)



AP, IB, Independent research and projects, mentorships, apprenticeships, authentic work in domain



School-based and outside-of-school programs that develop foundational knowledge and skills at appropriate (accelerated) pace

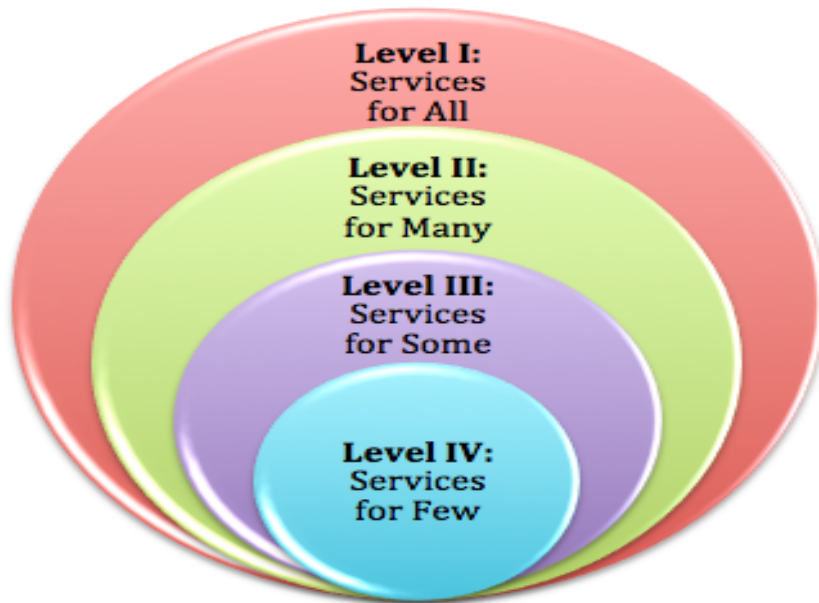


Early exposure and playful engagement through family activities, formal enrichment activities

School-Based Programming

Enrichment, Exploration,
Exposure – “Talent Mining”

Levels of Service



Level I Services for All (Early Childhood and Elementary): Differentiation, cluster grouping; creative and critical thinking units; and inquiry-based learning to foster talent and discovery of student strengths.

Level II Services for Many (Early Childhood and Elementary): Co-teaching/push-in to address specific needs, flexible grouping, after school programs, summer school

Early Childhood-Elementary

- “Gifted” Curriculum (e.g., Wm & Mary units) for all
- Enrichment
- Differentiated instruction
- Flexible and cluster grouping
- Universal screening (achievement, abilities)
- Accelerative options

Supplemental Programming

Enrichment, Exploration,
Exposure – “Talent Mining”



Pathways Model in Enrichment Programs

A student's pathway is described not only by *what* they study, but also by *how* their learning experience varies and evolves over time and across settings.

Talent Development Framework Details

STAGE	CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION	PSYCHOSOCIAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT	PROGRAMMING FOCUS	PARENT ROLE
Emergent Talent	Foundational knowledge and skills in core subjects. Academic skill development.	Self-regulation of emotions and behavior. Development of attention and focus. Socializing with peers.	Enrichment that is interdisciplinary, inquiry-based, hands-on. Opportunities to explore a variety of subjects and define interests in core subjects. Early access to advanced content in areas of demonstrated strength.	Expose child to different talent areas via informal or formal enrichment opportunities to develop and ascertain child's area of interests and abilities. Promote curiosity, engagement, and motivation and growth mindset.

CTD Supplemental Programming

	Learning Environment	Age or Grade	Length of Course	Length of Class	Student Evaluation
Tadpole Academy (Parent-Child)	In-Person	Age 3	3 class meetings	1.5 hrs	Feedback direct to parent within class
Online Family Program (Parent-Child)	Online	K - Grade 3	4 consecutive weeks of access	2-4 hrs per week	Feedback direct to parent in class
Age 4 Classes	In-Person	Age 4	8 or 6 consecutive Saturdays	2.5 or 3 hrs	Enrichment format
Challenge Lab	In-Person	Grades 1 - 5	5 consecutive weekdays	3 hrs	No
Leapfrog-Spark	In-Person	PreK – Grade 5	5 consecutive weekdays	3 or 6 hrs	Enrichment format
Weekend Enrichment	In-Person	PreK – Grade 8	8 or 6 consecutive Saturdays	2.5 hrs	Enrichment format
Accelerated Weekend	In-Person	Grade 3-8	2 consecutive weekend days	4.75 hrs	No



Tadpole Academy facilitates emergent talent with direct involvement of parents

Online Family Program

- Direct involvement of parents
- Building community of like-minded peers
- Flexibility in parent participation
- High-level content
- Off-screen, hands-on activities

The screenshot displays the 'Fractions, Beyond Pizza' online family program interface. The top navigation bar includes 'Northwestern CTD', 'COURSES', 'GROUPS', 'RESOURCES', and 'TOOLS'. The main content area is titled 'Fractions, Beyond Pizza (Gr. 3-5) Fall 2018' and 'Course Design and the Role of Parents/Caregivers'. It features a sidebar with a 'Fractions, Beyond Pizza' logo and a list of resources: 'How This Course Works', 'Bloom's Taxonomy', 'Growth Mindset', 'Illinois Association for Gifted Children (IAGC) Presentation', and 'The Joan Ganz Cooney Center'. The right sidebar shows a 'Highlight User' section with '16 Posts' and '13' comments. Below this, there are three posts: a post by 'Hadley Pace' dated 'Fri Oct 19, 2018 at 5:28 pm' with the text 'hi ole I like your slideshow maby next time you could youse multable types of questions', a post by 'Parker Ettinger' dated 'Sat Oct 20, 2018 at 9:19 am' with the text 'Hil I made a test booklet for my Dad with plans to build me a playhouse. I learned that estimating is a quick v to round with fractions. And, I learned that you can't "fraction" a window! ha!', and a post by 'Amy Schneider' dated 'Mon Oct 22, 2018 at 12:48 pm' with the text 'I really enjoyed your project, Parker! You have created a project based learning type of challenge he connected the learning to the real world. Super job! Your project connects to the final project of our'. The bottom of the screen shows a taskbar with various open applications, including 'OK Readers: Creating the X-M...', 'googleadservices.com/pa...', 'Sisters: Raina Telgemeier: 860...', and 'Awards Front Page | Comic-C...'. The page number '31' is visible in the bottom right corner.



Enrichment courses provide an independent classroom experience but do not require parent participation or testing to determine eligibility.

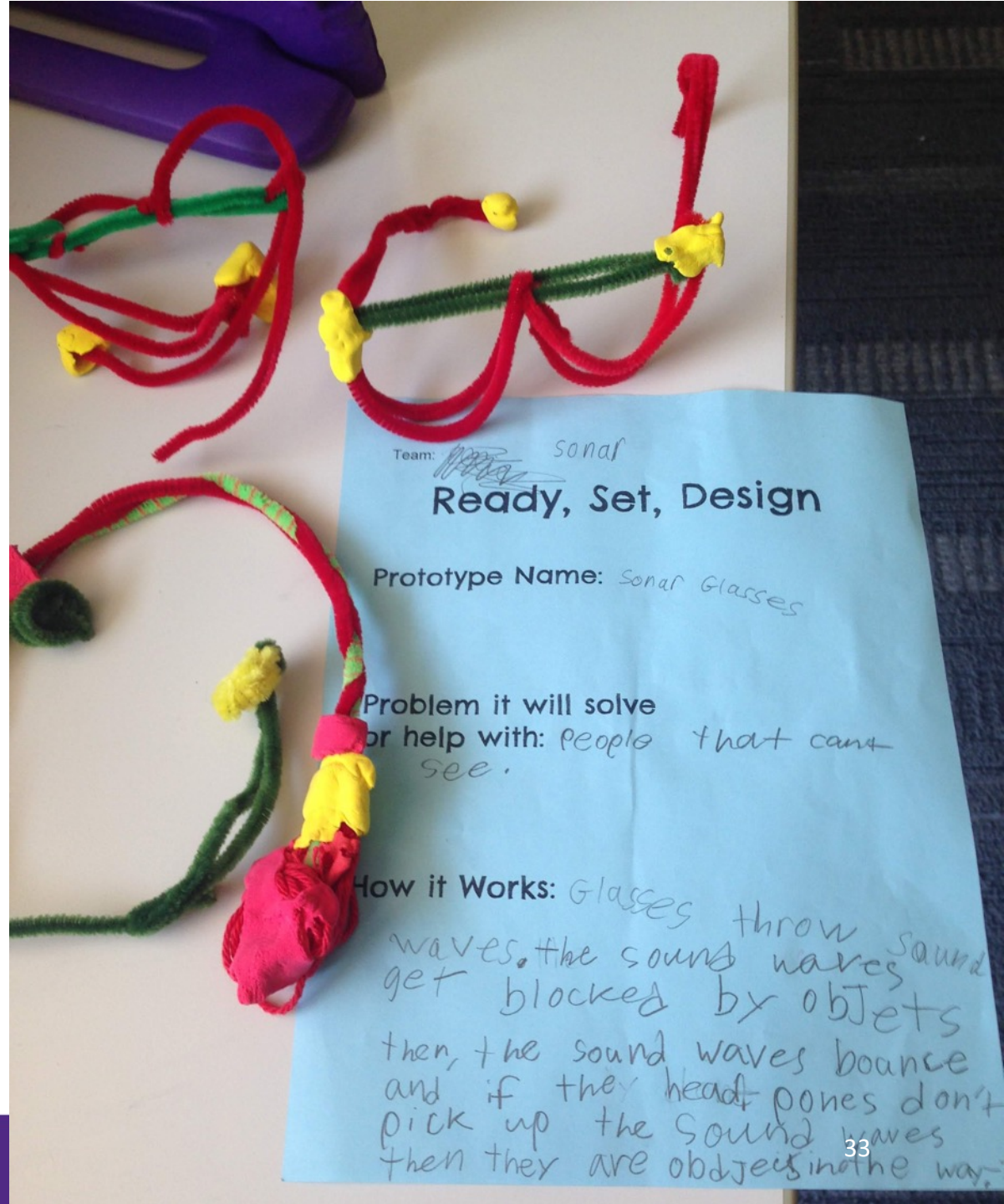
Through play, students explore and demonstrate interests, strengths, skills.

Challenge Lab Makerspace & Accelerated Weekends

Exposure & Application

Makerspace - Exposure and creativity are valued over progress toward predetermined learning goals

AWE - Focus is exposure to application of interest and skills in a professional context



Conclusion

- Early identification of students' talents is appropriate and necessary, particularly for children who may have had limited opportunity to learn.
 - Minimize excellence gaps, develop talents fully
- Identify from a talent development approach by providing rigorous learning opportunities followed by more formal identification