RETHINKING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPING STUDENT TALENT

ALITE INTERNATIONAL WEBINAR SERIES
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CONTACT INFORMATION AND A LIST OF RELEVANT REFERENCES ARE INCLUDED AT THE END OF THE PRESENTATION

Please contact me if you would like a copy of these slides or any of the publications.
THE WORLD IS CHANGING A LOT

• Consider how we consume music:
  - Live performances → albums → cassette tapes → CDs → streaming
• Each evolution had large, unsettling impacts on music companies, artists, consumers, merchants
• Some impacts were negative, some positive
  + Musicians can subvert gatekeepers to record their music and reach an audience
  - Lower royalty rates, splintering of audiences
Task requirements change; generally service jobs: hair stylist, home healthcare aide

Usually sales and office work
QUICK QUIZ!

• How many people worked as smartphone designers in 2007?
  • Practically none, and they were all locked in Steve Jobs’ basement.
change is coming,
whether you like it or not!
ALL ASPECTS OF OUR LIVES HAVE SEEN THESE CHANGES

- It is difficult to think of an area of our lives that is not undergoing massive change.

- As a result, the skills and achievements that enable individuals to stand out as “gifted” or “talented” in any given field have shifted, as well.

- Yet our approach to gifted education and talent development has not changed at the same pace as other societal & cultural developments.
TRADITIONAL APPROACHES IN MOST COUNTRIES

- “Find the gifted child”
  - Very test-focused, few false positives/many false negatives
- Maybe some enrichment options (going deeper)
- Maybe some acceleration options (going faster)
- Special schools and other pull-out programs
- Often nothing at all
  - “These students can take care of themselves”
RESULTS OF TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

• Very mixed research results
• Services often a mix of strategies without coherence or rigor
• Limited evidence students in pull-out programs gain much from those experiences
• Huge equity gaps in participation and outcomes (excellence gaps)
NAEP % ADVANCED MATH GRADE 4

Not great

Not bad
CONTEXT …

• … is a crucial unit of analysis for understanding how talent emerges, becomes valued, and garners resources and support

• *giftedness, talent, intelligence, creativity, etc.*, need to be defined solely within context

• For example, Plucker Beghetto & Dow (2004) define creativity as:
  • the interaction among aptitude, process, and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a *social context*” (p. 90, emphasis in original)

• From this perspective, looking for *universal* examples of creative potential in K–12 students is not particularly useful
AN EXAMPLE (FROM BARAB & PLUCKER, 2002)

- Student attending intensive summer program for talented students

- Poor performance and poor peer interactions made instructors question why she was in the course

- During the course, they learned she had no experience with problem-based learning in her urban high school; she was also uncomfortable being in a group with so many suburban students

- The instructors were asking, “Why is this student doing poorly?” But from a sociocultural perspective, a better question is, “How could the context be modified to allow the student to succeed?”

- We tend to ask the first question when potentially talented, low-income students fail to achieve at high levels. We should instead be asking the second question.
BASIC TENETS OF A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON TALENT AND GIFTEDNESS

1. Knowledge = socially valued forms of thinking, valuing, and acting
2. Learning is distributed across people, tools, and contexts
3. Learning and development occur in the Zone of Proximal Development

Worry less about finding talented students and more about creating talented contexts that help more students achieve excellence
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APPLICATIONS TO ADVANCED EDUCATION

• Identification systems should focus on a wide range of variables that may contribute to success within your programs
  • E.g., universal screening, fewer/smarter nominations, self-nominations, automatic enrollment

• Services should focus on problem-based learning, preferably within a curriculum that emphasizes connections to the community

• Assessment should be realistic; less telling and more showing

• Context should be the driving force: Use local norms in identification, use curricula that is linked to the communities in which students live, use assessments that require students to apply their knowledge to solve real-world problems
EXAMPLE:
WHAT’S YOUR SCHOOL’S TALENT DEVELOPMENT PLAN?
THINK OF IT AS A "CONTEXT AUDIT"

YOU PROBABLY ALREADY HAVE A NUMBER OF ADVANCED EDUCATION SERVICES, BUT THEY LIKELY AREN’T COORDINATED
KEY QUESTIONS

• How does a talented young child move through your schools from K-12?

• How would you describe the process/services to a parent of a talented child?
KEY QUESTIONS

• Do you include ALL of your excellence programs in your TD plan?
  • Gifted, honors, AP, acceleration, grouping, academic counseling, dual credit, aid for economically vulnerable families, etc.

• Does your TD plan address transitions among grade levels? (Biggest parent concern)
Talent Development Plan

- Universal screening
- Discovery School admissions
- Universal screening
- End of Year Progress
- Gifted Program ID
- Gifted Program ID
- Gifted Program ID
- Gifted Program ID
- Gifted Program ID
- Universal screening
- Gifted Program ID
- Gifted Program ID
- Gifted Program ID
- Gifted Program ID

- K
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12

- Early entrance
- Primary Talent Pool
- Gifted education program
- Accelerated options
- Honors courses
- AP
- NHS
- Individual college coaching
- Early graduation
A More Advanced Example ...

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**Teaching Strategies Used**

- Teachers use Teaching Strategies Goal for progress monitoring of student skills. Due to this being individualized, it gives the teachers the opportunity to identify skill gaps in their students.
- Creative Curriculum: Focused on the development of students who are at risk above their peers. They use different forms of the Creative Curriculum to make sure they aremeeting individual needs. This is not for all students, not just ones above their expected range.

**Leadership Development**

Students will investigate key characteristics of powerful leaders, learn problem-solving skills, and plan a school/community service project.

**ATLAS**

Advanced Topics in Language Arts class offered in partnership with FPRC, DCEC, and CareerTech performance. Students are nominated to take an advanced English Language Arts class. This is a combined class of 7s and 8th graders who are at reading level and writing level grade level and who would benefit from a challenging course of study. Some students in the class are identified as gifted, and some are not, and attend receive instruction at a minimum 9th/10th grade level.

**TOMODACHI Shinto-sekai: Frankfort Educational Exchange Program**

It is a joint program with Japanese students to strengthen relationships and give these leaders global skills and minds that will allow them to contribute and thrive in the world.

**Early College**

1) Established early college access for all students starting with Juniors and Seniors — 50 students enrolled at least one dual credit class during the 2018/19 fall semester at a community college.
2) Immediate access to dual credit classes held at Frankfort High School, taught by KU professors.
3) Established partnership MCA with Kentucky State University that provides Frankfort students with immediate access to community-university life.
4) Collaborative on KU in the design of learning and learning pathway - Educator Prep coursework — targeting underserved region students.

**Professional Membership Program**

All students at Frankfort High School will participate in the 12-week professional learning modules, in local businesses and organizations.
KEY QUESTIONS:

• How does a talented young child move through your schools from K-12?

• How would you describe the process/services to a parent of a talented child?

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• Does your TD plan address transitions among grade levels? (Biggest parent concern)
SUMMARY

• Of course, sociocultural contexts can be largely ignored when working with gifted students
  • Focusing on individual gifted students is a time-tested approach about which many advocates and educators feel passionate
  • This approach may lead to impressive educational accomplishments

• However, many low-income students are not broadly successful within this approach, nor are women in certain STEM disciplines
  • In most countries, that's well over half the students, calling into question how well the traditional approach works

• In addition, many of the students who appear to thrive in the “context-neutral” approach likely benefit from a range of unnoticed or invisible contextual advantages that are not available to other students

• Advanced programs that emphasize problem-based learning with real problems, require social interaction among talented students, are aware of the cultural context in which student work is situated, and emphasize the importance of noncognitive skills in achievement have the potential to better prepare students for successful use of their talents in real-world settings.
THANK YOU!

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http://jplucker.com
REFERENCES


Hardesty, J., McWilliams, J., & Plucker, J.A. (2014). Excellence gaps: What they are, why they are bad, and how smart contexts can address them … or make them worse. *High Ability Studies, 25*, 71-80.

