

Chapter 1

Historical Overview of Adult Gifted Education in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Giftedness is not present only in childhood. It persists for a lifetime. However, even though most colleges/universities provide special needs services for appropriate students, most if not all college faculty might not believe it necessary to provide any accommodations for gifted/talented students either at undergraduate or at the graduate level. In order to accommodate one or more gifted/talented students in a class, faculty need to rethink their pedagogy and assessment strategies. At the college/university level accommodations are usually absent because faculty do not perceive a need to do so in their courses. In courses for pre-service teachers, some instructors provide practices in courses including how to teach gifted and talented students in basic education settings for K-12 grades. This chapter presents a brief overview of gifted and talented education in the United States focusing more specifically on gifted and talented at the university (or adult) level.

SETTING THE STAGE

When college faculty design syllabi, the varied interests and abilities of the students enrolled must be considered providing an assortment of assessment choices that meet the requirements of the curricula and that give all levels of students an opportunity to develop their products according to their interests, abilities and relevance to the students that they are planning to teach. A universal design for instruction is

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one way to provide differentiation of instruction in each class. Differentiated instruction is accomplished through assessments and activities that are relevant to varied learning styles and interests within the course outcomes. At the university level, students are completing, or have completed diplomas, from accredited pK-12 schools followed by two-four years of content specific coursework at the college/university. Hopefully students then arrive in their education courses, either during their undergraduate education or following at the graduate level, with a fairly good set of skills and content in a discipline explicit manner. Because giftedness is not always apparent during the first meeting of a course the instructor must consider differing ability levels when designing assessments and assessing material that students develop on an ongoing schedule during the course and begin the process of determining which students possess gifted and talented characteristics. From the first day of class, faculty may begin to identify gifted students during assessment of products and dialogue in the classroom. Faculty note that the gifted students in a college classroom are usually not afraid to take risks and to explore areas in which they feel they lack knowledge. They actively attack the material and show a level of interest beyond what the more conventional students show. They take these risks by selecting more challenging topics for research and by attempting in their own research to explore areas that have not been dealt with sufficiently in the past. They actively examine the material presented and show a level of interest beyond what the more conventional students show. This is as true on the undergraduate level as it is on the graduate level. It is in curriculum and assessment design that the needs of the students are considered. It is the job of the professor to provide the inspiration and direction of the products that is critical to meeting the needs of the gifted students.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

There is an abundant amount of research focusing on gifted students at the K-12 level. Those of us working with gifted students in university settings face many of the same challenges faced by our colleagues in the elementary and secondary schools. There is, however, insufficient research on giftedness at the collegiate level (Rinn & Plucker, 2004) or beyond (Perrone, Perrone, Ksiazak, Wright, & Jackson, 2007). Additional research is needed to focus on these collegiate populations and beyond the college classroom. While much attention has been given to the education of gifted children and adolescents, very little work has been done on the teaching of gifted adults, especially those in teacher education. Kristin, Stephen, Tracy, Amy, & Vannatter, 2010) questioned gifted adult participants who enrolled in honors courses in college about their experiences in these courses (both positive and negative). They found that one fourth of the adults reported honors classes to be challenging and rewarding (Kristin et al., 2010). A small percentage of students (12-16%) liked the small class size, and enjoyed the social interaction but found the coursework overwhelming (Kristin et al., 2010). A few of the honors programs (5.9%) that were studied (Kristen et al., 2010) revealed that gifted and talented students had provided for an earlier graduation date, a faster paced learning experience, and a sense of accomplishment. The study also showed that the students found that programs could be disappointing when they were not designed for specific fields of study (Kristen et al., 2010).

A prior study by Hébert & McBee (2007), examined how involvement in college honors programs influenced the intellectual, social, and emotional development of seven gifted university students. The original study found the students had experienced a sense of isolation as adolescents, resulting from differences between their abilities, interests, life goals, and religious value systems and those of the com-

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