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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet provides a general overview of career education and career guidance programs and practices for gifted and talented students. Topics covered include: (1) a definition of gifted and talented students; (2) the importance of early identification; (3) characteristics of the gifted and talented; (4) career development needs in the areas of self-awareness, independence, mentorship, exploratory vocational experiences, and time; (5) special problems of gifted and talented females; (6) guidelines for program development; (7) staff development needs; and (8) characteristics of successful teachers of the gifted and talented. A bibliography of resource materials available through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system cites six references and four additional resources. (DC)

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Gifted & Talented.

OVERVIEW: ERIC Fact Sheet No. 3.

by

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult,
Career, and Vocational Education

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This Fact Sheet provides a general overview of career education and career guidance programs and practices for gifted and talented students. It is designed to help increase your understanding of the career development needs of this special population and to assist you in planning appropriate career education and guidance programs. In addition to the overview presented, resources from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system have been listed. These resources provide more complete information that can help you plan, implement, and evaluate career education and career guidance programs for gifted and talented students.

Relying too heavily upon standardized measures in identifying gifted and talented students can be misleading and discriminatory, especially for the disadvantaged students. There are several learning characteristics that are evident in most gifted and talented students at a very young age. Parents and teachers should be aware of these characteristics in order to determine whether or not they should recommend a child for further assessment by the school psychologist. The following are some of the more obvious characteristics:

- A keen power of observation
- The ability to conceptualize, synthesize, and think in abstractions
- An intense attention span and power of concentration
- A verbal proficiency, large vocabulary, and love of reading at a very early age
- Unusually creative or inventive behavior
- Persistent goal-directed behavior
- Liking for structure and order
- Interest in cause-effect relations and the ability to understand relationships
- A questioning attitude and constant intellectual curiosity
- In-depth sensitivity
- High energy and alertness
- Independence in work and study

WHO ARE THE GIFTED AND TALENTED?

The Gifted and Talented Education Act of 1978 defines gifted and talented children and youth as those persons who are identified at the preschool, elementary, or secondary level as possessing demonstrated or potential abilities that give evidence of high performance in one or more of the following areas:

- General intellectual ability
- Specific academic aptitude
- Creative and/or productive thinking
- Leadership ability
- Visual and/or performing arts

Early identification of disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students is critical. By the time these students reach junior high or high school, their academic potential and special talents have been diverted by a lack of positive reinforcement and often buried by the frustration of a host of discriminatory barriers. Moreover, early identification is crucial for all gifted and talented students if we are to properly address their educational, social, and psychological needs.

WHAT ARE THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS?

Because of their accelerated development and the intensity and depth of their interests and abilities, gifted and talented students have special career development needs.

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- **Self-Awareness** The fact that gifted students usually possess many talents and varied interests complicates their selection of a career. Although multipotentiality is by no means a characteristic of all gifted and talented individuals, it is a characteristic of most. These students see meaning in many career pursuits. They frequently become frustrated and paralyzed by indecision when faced with selecting one choice from so many alternatives. The confusion resulting from multiple abilities and interests could be reduced by means of a more in-depth approach to the problem of self-discovery and the development of self-understanding. Career guidance-related activities should be aimed at stimulating these students to learn more about themselves beyond the cognitive consideration of abilities and interests; they should be guided to explore the more personal dimensions of career development, such as basic attitudes, beliefs, and values.

- **Independence** The constant awareness that parents, teachers, friends, and society in general expect "great things" from these students often forces the gifted and talented individuals to become dependent upon what others think is "right." Perceived failure to live up to the high expectations of significant others can be emotionally devastating; constantly striving to please all significant others can be physically exhausting. In addition, the extended years of education chosen by many gifted and talented individuals can deter the development of certain psychosocial needs. Many times, individuals remain both financially and emotionally dependent upon parents for an inordinate length of time. Career guidance activities are needed to educate and encourage these individuals to develop their independences and their ability to make better decisions based on personal goals rather than the expectations of others.

- **Mentorship** The role of significant others is not always detrimental to the career development of gifted and talented individuals. In fact, it is of great importance. By identifying with significant role models, these students learn how to use their talents and "special gifts" in a real job. Mentorship encourages students to picture themselves in roles that frequently do not exist in their everyday environment. This is especially true in the case of the economically disadvantaged child. Personal identification leads to direct involvement, and this involvement can lead to realistic and rewarding aspirations. Even some of the problems of gifted under-achievers can be solved by positive and in-depth contacts with significant role models.

- **Exploratory Vocational Experiences** Gifted and talented students, like many students, have an unrealistic view of the world of work. Many of these individuals remain in educational institutions and pursuits so long that their knowledge of the "outside world" is distorted or even threatening. Since these students are not particularly helped by descriptive pamphlets and statistics about various occupations, a more subjective conceptualization of a career is needed. Direct exposure to a career field and to persons engaged in the work is desirable.

- **Time** For young people who choose long-term training careers, the investment of time in preparation for entry into the career is heavy. Any reasonable adjustment that serves to eliminate time waste is worth consideration. Acceleration, advanced placement, and other flexible scheduling strategies should be seriously considered.

Finally, it is most important that we recognize that each gifted/talented student is an individual with unique needs and, like all students, should be counseled and respected as an individual.

WHAT SPECIAL PROBLEMS/BARRIERS EXIST FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED FEMALES?

As already mentioned, the lack of appropriate role models can be a problem for many gifted and talented individuals. This problem is especially prevalent with gifted females who show keen interest and abilities in those areas traditionally dominated by males. Several studies over the last decade indicate that many promising females do not enter science and mathematics careers due to age-old socialization pressures and a lack of same-sex role models with which to identify. Evidence supports the need for special career counseling for women to encourage them to enter non-traditional roles and thereby help remove some of the psychological barriers that still dominate the working world. Too many young women still view marriage and a career as two mutually exclusive paths. Unfortunately for those bright young girls who are considering medicine, or other such careers that require rigorous and long-term investments of time, the expectancy to rear a family (if one is desired) can become a frustrating dilemma.

The situation of gifted female students is an intense example of the need for special guidance programs for the talented and gifted.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

There have been several efforts to develop programs specifically designed to meet the career development needs of gifted and talented students. Most of these programs stress that career education and guidance activities for the gifted and talented include the following elements or considerations:

1. Begin in the early preadolescent years in order to more effectively foster self-discovery, encourage independent decision making, and combat detrimental and unrealistic attitudes.
2. Provide problem-solving experiences that encourage divergent and creative thinking and also decision-making skills.
3. Provide in-depth exploration of careers that includes direct and meaningful contact with mentors or role models.
4. Assist in the development of time management skills.
5. Foster independent inquiry.
6. Provide activities to help students clarify their values and personal goals.
7. Be more discriminating and thorough in providing individual feedback about competencies and interests.
8. Foster positive self-images.
9. Provide individual counseling.
10. Provide a variety of resources for career planning (computer assisted guidance systems are popular with many gifted and talented students).
11. Differentiate teaching and counseling strategies.
12. Maintain flexibility in scheduling and assignments.
13. Plan cooperatively with students, parents, teachers, and community resource people.
14. Provide inservice training for staff development needs.

WHAT COMPETENCIES DO PROGRAM STAFF NEED?

If you are faced with the problem of staffing a career education/guidance program for the gifted and talented or if you are concerned about the inservice needs of current staff, the following suggestions should be of interest to you. Teachers and/or counselors should—

1. be well-grounded in subject area (in this case, knowledge about career education, methodology, career development theories, and guidance and counseling techniques)
2. be knowledgeable about child development skills;
3. exhibit curriculum development skills;

4. demonstrate innovative approaches to teaching.
5. be familiar with teaching strategies that engage the higher orders of intellectual activity (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation)
6. be able to work cooperatively with parents, other teachers, and the community in planning and organizing program activities

In addition, the following traits are frequently listed by gifted and talented students as some of the characteristics of their "best" teachers

- Intelligent
- Flexible and creative
- Self-confident
- Sense of humor
- Fairness and patience
- Sympathy with problems of gifted and talented
- Enthusiasm for teaching and the subject matter
- Willingness to be a "facilitator" rather than a "director"
- Love of learning

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION . . .

This Fact Sheet has provided a basic overview of career education/career guidance for gifted and talented students. If you want more comprehensive information to help you initiate a gifted and talented career education/guidance program or to improve an existing program, the following resources will help you. These materials may be found in the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) collection by using the ED number indicated in the resource listing. Further, you can always find additional and related information from documents contained in the ERIC system under the following index terms (descriptors and identifiers). (The ones most directly related to the subject of this Fact Sheet are designated by asterisks.)

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| *Academically Gifted | Special Education |
| *Career Education | Special Programs |
| *Career Guidance | *Talent |
| *Children | Young Adults |
| *Gifted | Young Children |
| *Gifted Handicapped | Youth |
| Guidance | |

If you need further help in finding these or other materials, contact the User Services Coordinator, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1960 Kenny Road, Columbus, Ohio 43210. (Phone 800-848-4815 or 614-486-3655. Cable CTVOCEDOSU/Columbus, Ohio).

Materials published by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education may be purchased from National Center Publications at the same National Center address and phone numbers as the ERIC Clearinghouse.

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