The Amphitheater Model for Talent Development: Recognizing and Nurturing the Gifts of our *Lost Prizes*

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Abstract

Back in the early 1990s, three Manitoba School districts launched the *Lost Prizes* project to reclaim talented, at-risk high-school dropouts. Despite their unique gifts, these relationship-resistant youth were disenchanted, disillusioned, and disconnected. Many had major substance abuse problems and were engaged in serious criminal activity. At the time, in an attempt to focus our efforts and delineate strategies that might be effective with this group, our team of educators developed the Amphitheater Model for Talent Development. It has undergone revision over the years, but its emphasis has always been on equity, flexibility, and guiding practical interventions to identify and nurture the talents of all students, including those who have been hitherto marginalized. In this article, we discuss briefly the original *Lost Prizes* initiative (where Creative Problem Solving and mentoring were used in combination to turn around young lives), summarize more recent follow-up and current programs, and describe the Amphitheater Model itself.

***Keywords*:** Amphitheatre model; talent development; enrichment education; barriers to learning; Lost Prizes initiatives; mentoring.

When we first formulated the Amphitheater Model to guide our work more than two decades ago (Lamoureux, 2008; McCluskey, Treffinger, & Baker, 1995, 1998), we were concerned that gifted education had become, in a sense, stuck in antiquity. The social context of education was shifting markedly during that era. Just as photos-from-film were soon to give way to digital-camera downloads on computer monitors, the days of lecture-only instruction were starting to recede into the rear-view mirror of history.

The Times They Are A-Changin'

We felt it then, and even more so now. The children of the recent past and of today can be considered "digital natives," in that they were born into the age of new technologies (Prensky, 2001). For them, it is natural to turn to the Internet, iPods, iPads, and laptops to gather information in quick, effective fashion. They can employ calculator applications on cell phones to do their math, call upon ubiquitous spell-check programs to edit their written work, and even bypass keyboarding by "talking out" their school essays using dictation software. While "digital immigrants" (those of us born before the ever-burgeoning technological wave) struggle to keep pace, many of the new generation actually view e-mail as outdated. Instead, they communicate seamlessly via social networks: Now it is *Bebo*, *Facebook*, *Flickr*, *Friendfeed*, *Friendster*, *Hi5*, *LinkedIn*, *LiveJournal*, *MySpace*, *Twitter*, texting, and blogging that serve as the new media for obtaining and disseminating information (Anchan, Svenningsen, Tucker, Tucker, & Laube, 2013). It may not all be positive (Bauerlein, 2008), but it is the new reality. For good or for ill, young people are flocking to online networks en masse, and they are doing a tremendous amount of communicating through these sites (Boyd, 2008). And who knows what's coming next.

Many students who, from birth, have been exposed to entertaining, stimulating, and time-saving technology (including DVDs galore, life-like video games, and virtual programs), are not

going to be engaged by traditional ways of doing things. It is simply unrealistic to expect them to sit still for hours on end listening to old-fashioned lectures. The lecture method still remains a part of the process, but learning overall has become much more active and interactive. It is time to begin thinking about moving forward, rather than back, to basics.

There are real ramifications for enrichment programming. Not long ago, technology, higher-order thinking activities, and differentiated instruction were largely considered the province and prerogative of gifted education. Today, however, they are part of our educational world taken for granted and open to the majority of students. For gifted education to stay static in the face of such change would be a prescription for self-destruction. If we hope to remain relevant, our discipline has to adapt to the new realities and become part of the evolution. Yet, according to many, gifted education continues to remain narrow, inflexible, dogmatic, and resistant to change (Ambrose, Sternberg, & Sriraman, 2011).

Without doubt, there has been some encouraging movement in recent years. For example, the Renzulli Learning System – a web-based program developed at the University of Connecticut – informs users about Renzulli's seminal work in gifted education, identifies interest areas of participants, teaches how to use the Internet efficiently, and offers a substantial assortment of guided research projects for students of different ages (www.renzullilearning.com). The required annual site license allows teachers and parents to partake in the process, and provides a mechanism for students to pursue their interests and engage in motivating enrichment activities at various grade levels. While making real-life enrichment experiences available to many, this comprehensive programmatic option also gives high-ability individuals in particular plenty of opportunity to explore their passions, stretch their limits, and strive for higher levels of thinking and doing.

That said, although progress has been made in pockets, gifted education overall has been rather slow to respond to the shifting societal conditions and context. The ways of getting and sharing information are indeed changing at an extraordinary pace. The Internet has nourished global education (Anchan & Halli, 2003), and today's virtual communities allow young people to interact with peers and educators worldwide to make connections, solve problems, and create projects collaboratively and cross-culturally (Pascopella & Richardson, 2009). Global citizenship is no longer a vague, ethereal concept; it has become very tangible for teachers and learners in the new world order. To accommodate such change, gifted education must do far more to become more challenging, more inclusive, and more global.

There is another area in which gifted education has responded quite slowly. Technological advances, the rise of the profit-at-all-costs mantra, and other modern-day developments have caused, at least in part, some concomitant philosophical and behavioural changes among what appears to be a significant part of the population. More precisely, many talented people seem to be achieving personal success at the expense of others and of society in general. This possibility of misdirected talent is an important reason to build the teaching of morality, values, and ethics into gifted programming (Ambrose & Cross, 2009).

An Inclusive Approach to Talent Development

The Amphitheater Model for Talent Development pulls together some of the work done by members of our own team (McCluskey, Treffinger, & Baker, 1995, 1998). Shown in Figure 1, it represents a synthesis of several approaches: the McCluskey-Walker (1986) Integrated Enrichment Model, the Talent Identification and Development in Education (TIDE) overview (Feldhusen, 1995), and the Levels of Service (LoS) framework (Treffinger, Young, Nassab, & Wittig, 2004; Treffinger, Young, Nassab, Selby, & Wittig, 2008), including the specific "indicators of excellence" to guide enrichment programming.

In our view, the outcome-directed Amphitheater Model embodies the principles of differentiated instruction, in that it embraces diversity, emphasizes inclusion, and focuses specifically on teaching, learning, and talent development. The circular epicenter of the Model depicts what should be a major goal for educators worldwide: to create classrooms where all learners can discover and develop their strengths and talents as fully as possible.

To achieve this objective, it is necessary to have a solid base. The following five building blocks or *Foundations* in Figure 1 highlight specific areas of primary importance in the new educational context:

Foundation 1. Valued Outcomes and Authentic Assessment. One of the unfortunate and unintended results of the "no child left behind" movement was that the primary educational goal in large numbers of school districts became to build the skills of as many students as possible to a certain "acceptable" level. This objective must change. Rather than striving merely to develop basic, minimum competencies, should we not be working to maximize talent development? Part of challenge ought to be to identify worthwhile educational targets for students, educators, and community partners and to assess outcomes in a meaningful manner. Today, perhaps more than ever before, learning must be realistic, genuine, and authentic. Teachers have to move away from emphasizing memorization and rote learning of facts, and towards providing students with the opportunity to apply their knowledge to fit the times. We must value not only the knowing, but the doing as well.

Taking this perspective has implications for the evaluation of learning outcomes. If the goal is for students to acquire, demonstrate, and apply knowledge, standardized testing on its own is an inadequate method for assessing growth. Said simply, tests do not necessarily measure skills, productivity, or potential (Feuerstein, 1979; Gardner, 2000; Marzano & Costa, 1988; McCluskey & Walker, 1986; Treffinger et al., 2008). Accordingly, assessment must become more dynamic and authentic, and shift from being test-based to performance-based. When students are engaged through creative, real-life activities and given the chance to explore important issues in the manner of practicing professionals, assessment has to focus on longitudinal observations, portfolio development, and product quality and outcomes (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995; Hart, 1994; Renzulli & Reis, 1997; Slavin, 2012; Treffinger et al., 2008).

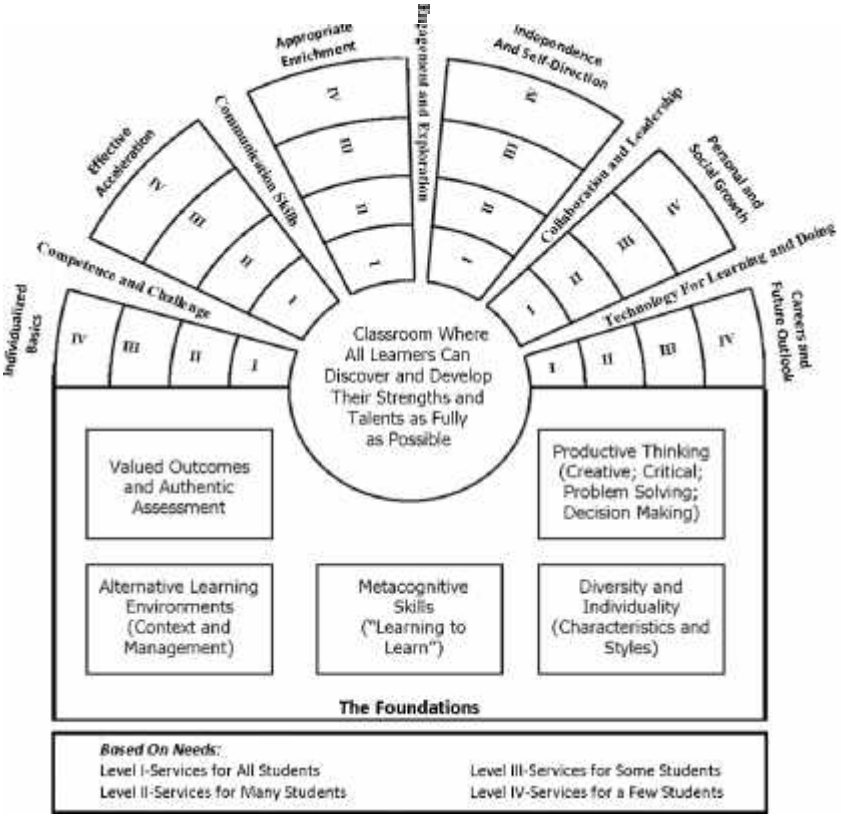

Figure 1: The Amphitheater Model for Talent Development. Used with permission of the Center for Creative Learning.

Foundation 2. Alternative Learning Environments. Not all learning takes place in school. Educators must seek out and use varied contexts beyond the typical classroom: "We would do well to consider education as taking place within an 'ecosystem of learning,' in which many components contribute to the goals of success and productivity and interact in interdependent ways. In addition to schools and classrooms, education is influenced by what happens in homes; at computers on the Internet; in community workplaces; in churches, museums, and theaters; on athletic fields; and in correctional facilities, youth homes, and health care centers" (McCluskey & Treffinger, 1998, p. 218).

Restricting instruction to inflexible, whole group, in-class routines is limiting and often inhibiting to talent development. It is necessary to individualize: For part of the day at least, different students can do different things at different times. Encouraging cooperative activities and creating learning centres can turn a classroom into a "learning laboratory." By using excursions and "field trips" in inventive fashion and, as mentioned, providing research opportunities for students to become real-world investigators, educators will make true enrichment more attainable (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995; McCluskey & Walker, 1986; Renzulli & Reis, 1997). Accessing material resources in the community (e.g., museums, universities, heritage buildings, and unique environmental settings) and "person-power" from without (e.g., volunteers, parents, and mentors) should be part of what a school is about. When designed appropriately, group and individual project work should extend and flourish outside the walls of the classroom. It becomes a matter of managing instruction in flexible ways to meet a variety of student needs.

Foundation 3. Metacognitive Skills. The information explosion and resulting paradigm shift in education dictate that students should not rely solely on material imparted directly by the teacher. On the contrary, they must move from memorization and regurgitation of facts to consciously analyzing their own abilities, monitoring their own thoughts and behaviour, and making choices about their own learning. If young people actively reflect upon their interests and preferences, if they know their strengths and weaknesses, and if they understand their personal and creative style, they will be better positioned to make informed decisions and to structure tasks and situations to their advantage.

Metacognition, or "thinking about thinking" (Armbruster & Brown, 1984), helps students reflect upon such things before, during, and after problem solving (Barrell, 1991). Teaching children to learn through self-awareness, task analysis, and systematic problem solving will set the stage for the development of responsibility and a passion for lifelong learning (Lamoureux, 2008). In fact, metacognitive strategies can and should be taught (Costa & Kallick, 2009; Osman & Hannafin, 1992; Perkins, 1995; Ritchhart, 2004). To illustrate, Creative Problem Solving (CPS) (Isaksen, Dorval, & Treffinger, 2011; Treffinger, Isaksen, & Stead-Dorval, 2006) – a powerful approach to teach problem-solving techniques (and build a "toolbox" of strategies) – can be used to enhance curriculum engagement across subject areas in early, middle, and senior years classrooms.

Foundation 4. Diversity and Individuality. Feldhusen (1995), Gardner (2000), and Sternberg (1997) argue that there are many types of talents or "intelligences." There have been many well-known instruments developed to identify different learning, personality, and creative styles, including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998), the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (Kirton, 1976), the Learning Styles Inventory (Dunn, Dunn, & Treffinger, 1992), and VIEW (Selby, Treffinger, Isaksen, & Lauer, 2002). While certain educators have concerns about the validity of some of these theories and inventories, at a broad level at least it seems intuitively obvious that people do indeed exhibit markedly different ways of thinking, reacting, and behaving. Almost any coach will acknowledge that you can't treat all athletes the same. And sensitive teachers know that you won't reach all students by using only one approach.

Since different children learn differently, diversity is a plus in the classroom. To put it succinctly, varying class activities and expectations increases the chance that all students will have their needs met. When they become more attuned to their own preferences and styles, children and adolescents (and adults) can adjust, adapt, and learn more effectively. In order to nurture and develop the diverse talents of the widest possible range of students, educators must individualize in creative, flexible ways.

Foundation 5. Productive Thinking. If students are to learn to confront issues, make their own decisions, and think critically and creatively, teachers need to emphasize problem solving in everyday situations. For students to develop self-efficacy, their thinking must go somewhere; it must at times be functional, practical, and crowned by concrete outcomes (Sternberg, 1997).

In short, students must have an opportunity to accomplish specific goals, experience success, and acquire a degree of mastery (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002; Lamoureux, 2008). Various programs, including TIDE (Feldhusen, 1995), the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) (Renzulli & Reis, 1997), the LoS approach (Teffinger, Young, Nassab, & Wittig, 2004), the Circle of Courage strength-based model of youth empowerment (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002), and CPS (Isaksen, Treffinger, & Dorval, 2011; Treffinger, Isaksen, & Stead-Dorval, 2006) have long histories of building these ingredients into the mix.

Figure 1 also shows five threads or *Strands* emerging from the epicenter and from the building blocks:

Strand 1. Competence and Challenge. Programming for enrichment demands that we stretch students by encouraging them to think creatively and go beyond basic memory tasks. Although the term "higher order thinking skills" (and Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* itself) has perhaps been overworked through the years, there is still no denying that teachers can guide students to greater levels of accomplishment by exposing them to challenges that involve analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956).

The literature examining differences in style and approach between "expert" and "novice" problem solvers indicates that experts take a broader view in perceptual organization and spend more time making plans, breaking problems down into component parts, and monitoring progress (cf. Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, with Shapka, 2009). Echoing previous comments concerning metacognition, many of the strategies, tools, and methods used for expert problem solving are decidedly teachable. To help young people produce original ideas by drawing from and using information, integrating and reconfiguring the material, seeking new combinations, and applying the emerging understandings to new situations is to personify a talent development approach. And to help them be successful in such higher-order ventures is to give them a sense of competence and mastery (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002; Smith & Lamoureux, 2004; Sternberg, 1996, 2006).

Strand 2. Communication Skills. Another goal for educators is to move past the "teacher talks – student listens" straight jacket (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, with Shapka, 2009, p. 442), and to provide support for students to express themselves, their questions, their concerns, and their ideas in many forms and through various media. Capable communicators listen, speak, read, write, and employ a variety of tools for personal expression. Students take more control of their own learning when they are given opportunities to explore strategies of reading, pre-writing, and creative and critical thinking, including options such as questioning, brainstorming, clustering, and webbing. When they integrate and connect such information among subject areas, teachers and their students can foster intellectual growth in an enriching, stimulating climate (Baker, McCluskey, Large, Gemmell, Sadowy, Wood, & Bevis, 1989; Brownlie, Close, & Wingren, 1988).

Strand 3. Engagement and Exploration. If educators are to take advantage of the natural curiosity of children and youth, they must allow them a voice. Students need to have input, and to some extent their work should be based on their own interests. There are inventories, such as The Interest-A-Lyzer (Renzulli, 1977), that can help teachers assess student interests. Good old-fashioned conversation and brainstorming can point the way as well. Not surprisingly, if schoolwork is tied to their passions, students have a personal investment in the content, processes, and outcomes. By definition, when they are driven by internal factors such as satisfaction or enjoyment, students are more likely to be engaged and produce high-quality work. Intrinsically motivated individuals explore problems with vigour and intensity and seek out and persist with challenges (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Curiosity, exploration, and risk-taking are sources of intrinsic motivation, but all require the freedom to make mistakes. Since mistakes are, by definition, part of learning, educators must be malleable enough to create supportive,

safe environments where students can take creative chances without fear. In such environments, discovery and self-directed learning will thrive (McCluskey & Walker, 1986; Renzulli & Reis, 1997; Treffinger, 1975; Treffinger et al., 2008).

Strand 4. Collaboration and Leadership. One necessary element of personal growth and well-being is for young people to become confident, self-reliant, and independent (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002). At the same time, however, there is also a need for teamwork and collaboration. Learning does not take place in isolation; in an enriched setting, students acquire skills to help them interact, communicate, and work together.

The cooperative learning literature illustrates how two (and more) heads can often be better than one when students learn to work productively in pairs, small teams, and large groups (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). If properly thought out and structured, cooperative learning can be effective with even highly diverse student groups (Baker & Clark, 2010). Talented individuals who understand the importance of working with others cooperatively, collaboratively, and creatively often contribute to organizations and society by taking on and redefining leadership roles (Isaksen, 2000; McCluskey, 2013). Clearly, then, students across the spectrum in our schools should be encouraged to develop their leadership skills.

Strand 5. Technology for Learning and Doing. As time goes by, information technology is likely to have an ever-increasing impact on all of us. It certainly can be argued that "computers are the future" (LaBerta, 2011). However, there is a need to go down the technological road with caution. Random, unguided exposure isn't always positive and skills children acquire on computers through general use will not necessarily translate into future competency (Friedman, 2005; Van Tassel-Baska, 2007). Technology offers great promise, but it is neither magical nor the be-all and end-all of education. Further, it must be recognized that some disadvantaged people have less access to technology than others in society. "Computers may be capacity extenders. Capacity building is a human struggle" (Anchan & Katz, 2003, p. 123). Responsible programming means that we take pains to ensure that appropriate and enriching instruction is provided to children in information technology, digital communication, and use of social media.

Embedded within Figure 1, the next component of the Model describes four necessary *Levels of Service for Effective Programming* (Treffinger, Young, Nassab, & Wittig, 2004; Treffinger et al, 2008). At **Level I**, the focus is on expanding learning opportunities *for all students*, in part by integrating higher order and creative and critical thinking strategies into the regular instructional package. Examples of Level I experiences include exposure to new topics (e.g., fine arts and foreign languages), general exploratory activities (e.g., guest speakers, field trips, and learning centres), and independent projects. Lamoureux (2008) provides another illustration where a teacher, in introducing a unit on global sustainability, might kick things off by asking an official from an environmental agency to visit and speak with the class. All students can hear and benefit from the message. They can all also participate in follow-up activities such as constructing, using, and maintaining a school compost bin.

At **Level II**, the emphasis is still on broad-based and inclusive services, but *for many students* rather than for all. Here there is a shift towards extending enrichment experiences beyond basic exploration. Not all students will be involved at this level, but any might become engaged based on their interests. Level II possibilities include participation in programs such as Future Problem Solving, Odyssey of the Mind, Junior Great Books, science fairs or invention conventions, band, theatre, debating, curriculum compacting, and after school, weekend, or summer enrichment courses. Such opportunities should be available to a large percentage of the class. To continue with the environmental example, many students may become genuinely passionate about the topic and actively involved in recycling projects.

Once teachers and students reach the higher levels, greater attention is paid to individual needs and characteristics. Participation is based less on voluntary self-selection and more on diagnostic planning. At **Level III**, the emphasis is on extending programming *for some students* to provide an appropriate challenge for those who exhibit interest, perseverance, and ability. Possibilities might include more focused follow-up sessions with guest speakers, intensive

individual or small group projects or thematic modules, art, drama, or music lessons, community problem solving, credit by examination, peer teaching, and university enrichment mini-courses. Returning to sustainability, some students may express an interest in reducing carbon emissions. In response, the teacher could call upon environmental scientists to set up special workshops at the local university. Individual or collaborative student projects might be part of the process.

Level IV involves individually designed options *for a few students* who have demonstrated unique abilities and talents. Activities here are carefully developed and put in place only after thorough consideration of relevant data and planning meetings with students and participating teachers, parents, and mentors. Level IV experiences might involve dual enrollment, advanced courses (perhaps at university), intensive work with mentors, conducting research or service projects, presentations to outside agencies, and subject or grade acceleration. Going back again to the environmental unit, an especially capable, committed student might be paired with a mentor for a term to undertake a major sustainability project such as assessing the eutrophication of an endangered lake, proposing a possible plan of action to reclaim it, and presenting that plan to government.

The final dimension of the Amphitheater Model depicted in Figure 1 involves six *Indicators of Excellence* (Treffinger, Young, Nassab, & Wittig, 2004; Treffinger et al., 2008):

Indicator 1. Individualized Basics. In various fields of human endeavour, we typically recognize that people are different. For example, we do not usually expect bankers to be poets, artists to all paint the same pictures, 300-pound offensive linemen to run 60 yards down field to receive passes from the quarterback, or the Dixie Chicks to sound like Marilyn Manson (McCluskey, 2000). Yet, even though it is, in a sense, undemocratic, many educators insist – in the name of equality – that we should treat all students the same. But they are not all the same. True fairness involves differentiating instruction and taking into account the personal and social context of each student. Individualized enrichment means basing instructional and curricular decisions on students' characteristics, creative styles, and prior experience and achievement.

Indicator 2. Effective Acceleration. All school subject areas should be fluid and allow opportunities for flexible grouping and continuous progress. In other words, rather than being stuck in a rigid pass-one-grade-get-to-go-to-another system, students should be able to move through the curriculum at a pace commensurate with their accomplishments and talents. The let-the-children-be-children folk wisdom notwithstanding, educational decisions should be based on fact, not myth (Feldhusen, Proctor, & Black, 1986). And the preponderance of longitudinal research consistently shows that allowing high-ability children into school early and/or permitting grade acceleration can be extremely beneficial for academic, intellectual, emotional, and social growth (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Gross, 1993; Proctor, Felhusen, & Black, 1986; Van Tassel-Baska, 1986).

Indicator 3. Appropriate Enrichment. As discussed earlier, enrichment can take place at many levels. In an enriched classroom, students are able, independently or collaboratively, to pursue their own interests, learn and apply problem-solving strategies, and identify and explore real-world issues (Renzulli & Reis, 1997; Treffinger, 1998).

Indicator 4. Independence and Self-Direction. Part of enrichment programming must involve creating a classroom and school environment that helps students become independent learners (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002; McCluskey & Walker, 1986). The teacher won't always be there: Talented students should be encouraged to develop self-reliance and to set challenging yet realistic goals, identify resources and opportunities, plan and put those plans into action, complete tasks, evaluate products, and share information with others (McCluskey & Walker, 1986; Renzulli & Reis, 1997; Treffinger, 1975).

Indicator 5. Personal Growth and Social Development. The learning environment and curriculum should be structured to foster high levels of self-esteem and confidence among

students. There must be success experiences. As well, young people must learn to recognize and respect the strengths and needs of others (McCluskey & Walker, 1986; Treffinger, Nassab, Schoonover, Selby, Shepardson, Wittig, & Young, 2003).

Indicator 6. Careers and a Futuristic Orientation. Career exploration is a critically important, but often neglected piece of the enrichment puzzle. In today's world, the job situation is shifting rapidly. Career opportunities are suddenly shutting down in some areas and, just as quickly, opening up in others. As a consequence, students must learn to cope with the new realities and to become adaptable, lifelong learners. They must also acquire a vision, the ability to predict future conditions and trends, and the willingness to prepare and ready themselves for the new realities of tomorrow (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000; Treffinger et al., 2003). By giving students a sense of purpose and direction, it is possible to reclaim and refocus even at-risk, relationship-resistant individuals (McCluskey, Baker, O'Hagan, & Treffinger, 1995; McCluskey, with Baker et al., 2012). One part of the process should be for educators to guide students in developing Individual Growth Plans outlining creative styles, school and outside interests, past experiences, and personal goals and the practical steps necessary to achieve them (Feldhusen, 1995).

We should mention that the Amphitheater Model has been criticized in some quarters for being "too complex." However, since the concepts and strategies involved are complicated – and since we have no desire to "dummy down" the process – we remain unapologetic. We're pleased that it has been employed, with modifications, as an "organizer" and "cognitive map" for students. It has also been used as a programmatic guide and anchor in several international projects designed to develop the talents of at-risk students, essentially – we have been told – because of its pragmatic emphasis on flexible facilitation, self-direction, and fairness.

In concluding this segment, it is also important to note that we are not suggesting that others import and apply the Amphitheater Model directly to their own educational contexts. Programming for children and youth, especially at-risk ones, is a complicated business. There are many variables to consider: the needs of the students, the characteristics of the school, the strengths and weaknesses of the staff, the nature of the community, and so on. And all these are in a constant state of flux and change. Basically, then, since no two programs are perfectly alike, no approach can fit them all. To seize impulsively upon one model from another place is actually the antithesis of creativity. It is far preferable for educators to be eclectic, to analyze various frameworks, to take what seems reasonable from several sources, and – after trying things on for size and making adjustments – to design their own unique model for their own unique setting.

Equal Opportunity for All

There was, and in many places still is, a tendency to select students for gifted programs predominantly on the basis of their scores on formal IQ (or other) tests. In our view, though, such old school, traditional approaches to identification exclude many disadvantaged individuals who have been marginalized for a variety of reasons. All too frequently, due to their unfortunate life circumstances, the talents of such at-risk students are missed, masked, or ignored simply because they and their families lack the social and cultural capital that sets the stage for success in school and in later life (Bersgaard & McCluskey, 2013). To put it succinctly, the playing field isn't even close to being even.

Tonemah (1992), in his research with Native American students, observed that educators too frequently concentrate on remedial programming at the expense of identifying and developing talent. Along the same lines, Torrance, Goff, & Satterfield (1998) spoke out against the notion that zeroing in on deficits somehow benefits troubled children and youth. They asserted rather that it is successful behaviour that motivates and allows students to maximize potential. In their view, the goal should be to build strengths, skills, and abilities; not to waste energy by ignoring the positives and over-emphasizing deficiencies.

Take, for example, a high-octane ADHD child. Parents and teachers confronted with the challenges of hyperactivity often, naturally enough, struggle just getting through each day. But if the focus is all on handling problems and managing the negatives, it's easy to miss a lot of "good stuff." Unfortunately, although usually well-intentioned, this sort of day-to-day survival

approach is limiting and restrictive. Caregivers who pay close attention, seek to identify the strengths of the child, and become "talent spotters" are likely to create more enriching, potential-enhancing environments (McCluskey & McCluskey, 2001; Young, 1995).

Relationship-resistant, behaviourally challenging, "tough bright" students do not usually find their way into gifted programs, which tend for the most part to be reserved for the teacher pleasers (McCluskey, with Baker, Bergsgaard, Glade, Lamoureux, McCluskey, & Wiebe; Peterson, 1997). The same is true for youngsters from minority groups (Sisk, 1993) and for children of poverty (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2011; Renzulli & Park, 2000). Relatedly, the incredible talents of young people who turn to gang and criminal activity often go totally unnoticed. Yet how much talent does it take to become a successful member or leader of a youth gang? Should gangs be considered a "cesspool or talent pool" (Baker, McCluskey, & McCluskey, 2003)? Without doubt, life in a gang can be aversive, destructive, and downright evil at times. Nonetheless, not just anyone can survive in such a setting – it takes talent. The challenge becomes redirecting such talent into more socially appropriate pursuits.

Actually, the late Robert B. Parker hit the nail on the head in *Double Deuce*, one of his fictional *Spenser* mysteries (first published in 1992). In this novel, a teacher offered the following description of members of a youth gang: "They are often quite ingenious. They function barely at all in school, and the standard aptitude tests seem beyond them, and yet they are very intelligent about surviving in fearful conditions. They are often resourceful, they fashion what they need out of what they have. They endure in conditions that would simply suffocate most of the Harvard senior class" (Parker, 2005, p. 221-222).

What a pity not to identify and build upon such talent! The monetary cost of missing out on this potential has been well documented (cf. McCluskey, with Baker et al., 2012). Besides, as we've noted elsewhere, there is also the less quantifiable social cost of what might have been: "What is the cost of a symphony unwritten, a cure not discovered, a breakthrough not invented? In today's complex world, and in preparing for tomorrow's certainly more complex one, we can scarcely afford such waste of 'talent capital' and human potential" (McCluskey & Treffinger, 1998, p. 216).

Like the Amphitheater approach, the model developed by Matthews and Foster (2006) considers the shifting paradigm in gifted education and, in essence, rejects elitist, non-inclusive approaches to enrichment by matching educational provisions and adaptations to each child's unique needs. Of course, the ultimate goal should be to create schools that focus on talent development for all (Renzulli & Reis, 1997; Treffinger, 1998; Treffinger et al., 2008).

Talent Development for *Lost Prizes*

As indicated at the outset, some two decades ago the Lord Selkirk, Sunrise, and Interlake School Divisions in Manitoba designed and established *Lost Prizes*, an undertaking developed to "reclaim" at-risk, talented high-school dropouts who had basically been lost to the system. Most of the youth in question had withdrawn from school or been shown the door, and several had drug and alcohol issues or run afoul of the law. *Lost Prizes* presented a mechanism for educators in the divisions to reconnect with these students, awaken their dormant creative potential, and inspire them to do something more productive with their lives.

Essentially, *Lost Prizes* is a hybrid approach that weds theory and practice from both the at-risk and enrichment domains. For this reason, we believe, it has received a fair amount of enduring attention in the literature (McCluskey, 2011; McCluskey, with Baker et al., 2012; McCluskey, Baker, & McCluskey, 2005; McCluskey, Baker, O'Hagan, & Treffinger, 1995, 1998). In any case, during phase one of the initiative, a facilitator worked directly with the young people in an off-site setting. Classes featured career awareness, various types of strength-based interventions, and Creative Problem Solving (CPS) training (Isaksen, Dorval, & Treffinger, 2011; Treffinger, Isaksen, & Stead-Dorval, 2006).

Part of the problem with the troubled youth in question was that they tended to get "stuck" in negative, maladaptive response patterns. They would fight, flee, fool, freeze, or whatever, often without thinking, and make the same mistakes over and over again. Once these unengaged individuals acquired a broader array of CPS problem-solving strategies – a toolbox of skills if you will – they became better equipped to make more reasoned educational, career, and

life decisions. As part of the process, the students were asked to consider how to progress from their "current reality" to a "desired future state." They mapped out individual growth plans to help themselves identify and move towards goals. In phase two, these participants gained concrete experience through on-the-job placements, where – supported by empathic, philanthropic mentors from the business community – they had an opportunity to encounter and deal with real-life problems.

The *Lost Prizes* mission was a successful one. Specifically, once their talents were noticed, appreciated, and nurtured, 65 percent (57/88) of the former at-risk ne'er-do-wells turned their lives around by obtaining full-time employment, returning to high school, or entering post-secondary programs at community college or university.

A similar approach was used in the Northern Lights project to increase graduation rates among vulnerable Aboriginal students (McCluskey, O'Hagan, Baker, & Richard, 2000), and to reduce recidivism among inmates in Second Chance (Place, McCluskey, McCluskey, & Treffinger, 2000).

A Final Word and Update

By 1999, the initial *Lost Prizes* and related made-in-Manitoba spin-off ventures had come to an end, but interest in the undertakings remained. Related programs were established and continue to thrive in the three founding divisions. And a couple of years ago, faculty at the University of Winnipeg (UW) partnered with educators in the field to launch a one-year *Lost Prizes* project at Sisler High School and an ongoing initiative at the Manitoba Youth Centre.

We were surprised to find, after being asked to do several presentations for Reclaiming Youth International, the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, and the International Centre for Innovation in Education, that there was a great deal of interest in using the *Lost Prizes* approach to engage talented, troubled young people in other parts of the world. In the spirit of global citizenship, then, we have tried to reach out to a variety of partners, with the result that we are now working to put *Lost Prizes* programs and training centres in place in Kenya, Thailand, Haiti, and other countries.

Everyone involved in *Lost Prizes* outreach understands the importance of preparation and hands-on training. To meet this need, UW faculty members have created 25 three-day foundation and support courses to help those working with high-ability, at-risk populations acquire basic and more advanced competencies (participants can select and complete five of these courses to earn a *Lost Prizes* certificate, and 10 for an advanced certificate). Subject to university approval, these courses may be counted as electives toward the Bachelor of Education degree or, alternatively, toward a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Education.

As an aside, we are not attempting to establish a global franchise or charge exorbitant consulting or tuition fees. Our intent is simply to be supportive, share our work with interested parties, and deliver services at cost. In keeping with the Freirean principles of praxis (Freire, 1970), we are taking the time to talk with our international partners, to consider their on-site conditions, and to adapt plans to fit the local needs (cf. McCluskey, with Baker et al., 2012). We're entirely focused on developing something positive, collegial, and sustainable – something that will provide tangible encouragement, engagement, and enrichment to a population that often receives "none of the above."

In summation, *Lost Prizes* brings together and blends theory and practice from both the at-risk and gifted education realms. The goal of the program has always been to improve the talent identification process and nurture the gifts of highly capable, but disconnected children and youth. It is our hope that, through the Amphitheater Model and *Lost Prizes*, many talented young people who have been thus far marginalized will now have the opportunity to realize their potential and set out on a path to make incredible contributions to societies around the world.

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