

The **Top 10** Events Creating Gifted Education for the **New Century**

by Julia Link Roberts

The framework used to select 10 events in gifted education in this century was to ask what are the major events which have shaped the field as we are entering the year 2000. Which reports, issues, areas of emphasis, and occurrences have impacted the ways that children and adolescents who are gifted and talented are recognized and provided with services? What has been the impact of each of these important events in shaping the future of gifted education in the next century?

The Top 10 that will be described are not in order of importance, but rather they are presented in an approximate chronological order with the effect of the 10 events being seen as cumulative. Each event is important in and of itself; however, the impact of each is greater when it is seen in light of the other events. The Top 10 I have selected all have national impact, yet their selection was made with an eye to my perspective on the critical nature some of them have had on the education of gifted and talented youth in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Number One

In 1957, the launching of Sputnik I shook the confidence of the public in the United States, making it obvious that the Soviet Union was ahead in science and technology. The space race had begun. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 made federal funding available to capitalize on interest in supporting programs to develop talents. As has been typical in the United States, interest in educating gifted children to a high level has waned when there was prosperity and relative comfort among nations. However, when uncertainty appears on the international scene, plans to provide advanced and accelerated learning opportunities become a priority at the local, state, and national levels. During a crisis, gifted individuals are considered a valuable resource to be developed to the highest level. Decision-makers at all levels provided support for educational initiatives to offer challenging educational opportunities in mathematics and science to develop this precious resource to high levels following the launching of Sputnik I.

Number Two

The report entitled *Education of the Gifted and Talented*, known as the Marland Report was issued by the U.S. Office of Education in 1972 when Sidney P. Marland, Jr. was the U.S. Commissioner of Education. This report is significant in two respects. First, the report established the low-level of awareness or the high level of unawareness among educators about gifted children. Over half of the superintendents reported that there were no gifted children in their schools. Secondly, although the public generally has seen the intellectual-gifted person as "the gifted" individual, the Marland Report established six categories of giftedness. These areas were (1) general intellectual ability, (2) specific academic ability, (3) creative or productive thinking, (4) leadership ability, (5) visual and performing arts, and (6) psychomotor ability. The only area of giftedness which has not continued in subsequent definitions is the last one, psychomotor ability. This report led to

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the Office of Gifted and Talented Education in 1972 and leadership in the development of awareness of the needs of children who are gifted and talented.

Number Three

The establishment of national and state organizations in gifted education has been very important in the development of support and advocacy for addressing the needs of children and youth who are gifted and talented. In 1954, The National Association for Gifted Children was started, and now has affiliates in most states. Another important organization advocating for gifted and talented children is the Council for Exceptional Children, which has The Association for the Gifted as one of its divisions. Parents and educators combine their efforts in these organizations to provide leadership at state and national levels to ensure that the needs of children who are gifted and talented are not left out in the development of policies and legislation. The establishment of these organizations has been critical in building support for addressing the needs of gifted and talented children. Leaders of these organizations have realized that it is important to "be in the room when decisions are made" and have worked with decision-makers at all levels in order to build support through advocacy.

Number Four

The principles of differentiation were developed by the Curriculum Council of the National/State Leadership Institute on the Gifted and Talented in 1982 with Dr. Sandra Kaplan in the leadership role. The principles described the necessary components of curriculum which can be differentiated to address the needs of

children and youth who are gifted and talented. The dissemination of the principles of differentiation has led to the recognition that the key to successfully teaching children who are gifted and talented depends on matching instruction to "need." For children who are able to learn at a faster pace and at a more complex level, the "need" is actually the strength or strengths. Some school districts have adopted district-wide policies of differentiation, requiring differentiation for all students to allow for continuous progress.

Number Five

Brain research has added new dimensions to the understanding of human potential and how that potential can be developed. Findings from the on-going research in neuroscience highlight the need to provide a stimulating environment for all children, including children who are gifted and talented, if they are to develop their potential to the highest levels possible. Research findings emphasize the critical nature of the early childhood period. The findings from research on neuroscience have strong messages for parents and educators and the roles they play in developing human potential to optimum levels. Providing challenging learning opportunities is key to the continuing development of intellectual potential. These research findings have and will continue to provide the rationale and strategies for ensuring that children, including children who are gifted and talented, will maximize their potential.

Number Six

The establishment of residential schools for high school students has occurred in several states during the last two decades. These schools have been important in providing opportunities for young people representing an entire state

to come together to learn at challenging levels and to allow some of the very brightest students to make continuous progress. These schools have focused on mathematics and science, math, science, and the visual and performing arts. In 1980, North Carolina established the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics in Durham and several other states have opened residential schools since that time. The rationale behind residential schools recognizes that some students are ready for, and need, more advanced learning opportunities than others who are the same age. These schools provide evidence that "the least restrictive alternative" for many exceptional children may be the regular classroom; however, "the least restrictive alternative" for young people with advanced abilities or talents may be to learn together in a special school with others who share their interests and who have similar abilities. While the regular classroom is the least restrictive alternative for many exceptional children, opportunities for children and youth who are gifted and talented to learn with others who share their interests and who are ready to learn at an accelerated pace and at more abstract levels may be critical for them to achieve at levels commensurate with their abilities and readiness to learn.

Number Seven

The Richardson Study and Dissemination Conferences were influential in the 1980s and continue to shape gifted education in the last decade of the century. The Richardson Study, funded by the Sid W. Richardson Foundation to examine gifted education, and directed by June Cox, examined services and programs that resulted in recommendations for gifted education. The publication of the study was followed with dissemination conferences. Grants were available from the Richardson Foundation to hold a statewide conference to share the recom-

mendations. Key decision makers in a state were invited and the recommendations of the study became the points of discussion. Discussions at the Richardson Study Dissemination Conference stimulated valuable interest in addressing the needs of able learners, and this conference has served as a model for the annual Symposium on Kentucky's Children Who are Gifted and Talented. Bringing together decision makers from key organizations in education, business, and government has been essential in building support for addressing the needs of children and youth who are gifted and talented.

Number Eight

The Javits Gifted and Talented Students Act, passed by Congress in 1988, provided leadership in the field of gifted and talented education. The creation of the U.S. Office of Gifted and Talented Education meant that once again (the block grants of the 1980s eliminated the office) gifted and talented children have needs that must be addressed at a national level. The creation of the National Research Center for Gifted and Talented Children allowed for a research focus on gifted education. The third area of leadership made possible by the Javits Act was the funding of model projects to implement strategies and report results. The focus on gifted education at a national level has been very important in providing support to state education reform initiatives in the 1990s and in conducting research that has been critical in documenting areas of need for children who are gifted and talented as well as strategies that are effective in addressing those needs.

Number Nine

National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent was the second national report on the status of gift-

ed education. This report, issued in 1993, has once again focused the attention of educators and the public on "the quiet crisis" in which the needs of gifted children and youth are either not addressed, or are met in a fragmented way. The report states that gifted children are

"Children and youth with outstanding talent, perform, or show the potential for performing at remarkable high-levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment."

The definition stresses that "Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor." The recommendations of *National Excellence* has provided a blueprint which states have used in expanding their definitions of children who are gifted and talented and in describing the services they should receive.

Number Ten

State initiatives to require services in multiple areas of giftedness have begun in the 1990s. The mandate is to identify children who are gifted and talented in intellectual ability, a specific academic ability, creativity, leadership, and/or the visual and performing arts. After students have been identified, the multiple services options are examined in order to match services to needs. Kentucky is one of the states which requires services in all five areas of giftedness. Doing so necessitates talking about services rather than "the gifted program" because the "one-size-fits-all" program cannot match the needs of the diverse population which is identified in the five areas.

As the new century arrives, the education of gifted and talented children and adolescents cannot be ignored. All

children deserve quality educational opportunities to develop their potential; however, it is important to remember that all children are not identical and therefore, their academic and social-emotional needs are not the same. The two national reports of this century have established definitions that address several categories of giftedness. *National Excellence* clearly states that children who are gifted and talented come from all backgrounds, thereby clarifying that educators have the responsibility for being talent scouts, identifying children who display talent at a higher level when compared with age mates. Moving beyond "the gifted program" to services for gifted children, services which match needs rather than a one-size-fits-all program that may not offer articulated services. Recognizing that the least restrictive alternative for many gifted children is very different than it is for other exceptional children. Leadership in the field of gifted and talented education must be provided as parents and educators work and learn together. Key decision makers at the local, state, and national levels must be informed and involved if gifted children are to make continuous progress. They must know that continuous progress will take gifted and talented children way beyond grade level. Leadership must continue to be provided through a national research center and a national office of gifted and talented education.

The year 2000 which has seemed so far away for a long time has arrived. Events, including reports, issues, areas of emphasis, and occurrences have shaped our views of gifted and talented children and youth and allowed a broadening of our understanding of children who are gifted and talented and how we can best develop their potential. Let's learn from key events of the 1990s and create a promising future for *all* children in the 21st Century! ☀