Identifying Student Cognitive and Affective Needs

Mary S. Landrum

It is appropriate that the first chapter of this guidebook focuses on the children we teach. Specifically, this opening chapter focuses on the unique cognitive and affective learning needs of gifted and talented students that have been documented in long lines of research over the past century (Hollingworth, 1926, 1942; Terman, 1930; Gertzel & Gertzel, 1962). All aspects of gifted education programming and services—which are the subject of the remaining chapters in this guidebook—must emanate from highly able students’ recognizable educational needs that manifest themselves in their cognitive, psychosocial, and physiological development.

Various characteristics may indicate latent or emergent talent in gifted learners. Early and enduring traits of advanced cognitive ability may be evident in above-average logical thinking, questioning, and problem solving (Cox, 1926; Walberg et al., 1981). Students may also be developmentally advanced in language, thought, and comprehension; learn swiftly; grasp and manipulate sophisticated and abstract concepts at an earlier age; reason accurately, swiftly, and logically; reason mathematically at an advanced, abstract level; and/or demonstrate beyond-grade-level cognitive functioning in music or art (Clark, 2001; Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Davis & Rimm, 2004; VanTassel-Baska, 1998).

Other traits of gifted students may include motivation and persistence in learning, especially when pursuing their advanced interests (Davis & Rimm, 2004; Renzulli, 1978). Silverman (1980) calls these students “immersion learners” who delve into advanced interests with intense curiosity and determination to discover the unknown. Similarly, self-confidence and independence in learning may lead these students to set high goals. Frequently these students attribute their academic success to ability and failure to something
other than a lack of ability (Milgram & Milgram, 1976). Creatively gifted individuals differ somewhat from their counterparts who have high potential in academics. In particular, they have a greater tolerance for ambiguity, confidence and risk taking in learning and creative production, high energy, and curiosity and playfulness of ideas (Amabile, 1987; Davis, 1999; Getzels & Jackson, 1962; MacKinnon, 1961; Sternberg, 1988; Torrance, 1987; Wallach & Kogan, 1965).

In addition to advanced cognitive and academic aptitudes, the high-potential learner usually possesses healthy psychological development. Many experts and researchers suggest that affective development of gifted students differs from that of their same-age peers by intensity or degree. Many gifted learners are more self-confident about their ability to succeed and are more intrinsically motivated to succeed. Moral development and extreme sensitivity also mark the emotional intensity of the gifted child (Terman, 1930; Hollingworth, 1942; Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002).

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies, which illustrate many of the traits discussed above, have been selected for three reasons. First, they are real. Although some of the students’ names have been changed, the stories reveal true portraits of gifted and talented children in the 21st century. Second, the cases have been purposefully selected to illustrate the extraordinary diversity among gifted and talented students, K–12. Although they share similarities, the students presented here are markedly different from each other in their learning profile, learning needs, and the life circumstances that have shaped their development. Third, they have been selected to showcase the many varied programs and services that have been provided to meet their unique learning needs. The narrative that follows each case study highlights educational programs and services that have been selected to address each student’s educational needs. These varied interventions underscore the continuing importance of recognizing, understanding, and responding to the characteristics of giftedness and high potential.

Evan Feinberg

Evan Feinberg was the state and national winner of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Nicolas Green Award in 2000 when he was in fourth grade. Here is a portion of the essay that he wrote for this competition at age 9:

Ever since I can remember, I have had a passion for science & astronomy, and mathematics. In my past, I focused on the solar system. Presently, I am fascinated by the field of cosmology, physics, and particle physics. Cosmology is the study of the universe’s past, present, future, celestial objects, and the theoretical multiverse which is a web of different universes linked by black holes; particle physics is the opposite of cosmology, it is the study of the small such as elementary particles to superstrings. The cosmologist, Stephen Hawking, and especially the physicist, Albert Einstein inspired me to study these subjects and generate and spawn
theories of my own concerning the universe and the multiverse. Stephen Hawking’s discoveries of properties of black holes plus his creativeness of merging quantum mechanics (the study of the small and particles) and the theories of relativity (the theories of large scale) really made me more and more interested in this field. Albert Einstein’s biography, his theories of relativity (which are the special and general), and his contributions to the photoelectric effect has also had a great impact on my perspective of life and the universe around us. On a daily basis, I am lucky to have my teacher, Mr. Carbone, because he really inspired me in this subject. For example, he let me take the 4th grade telescope home to stargaze and look for celestial objects and constellations. In addition, he gave me a special research project to study a particular constellation, Bootes. His enthusiasm and love of learning has encouraged me to ‘reach for the stars.’

My deep thirst for knowledge has led me to pursue my research of astronomy and even create my own books to share with my family and classmates. I have written a comprehensive, beginner’s guide to cosmology, The Eight Books of Space-Time, and [another book] Space Bends While Time Warps: Play with Einstein’s Gravity. It is very rewarding when a classmate asks for a copy of one of these two books! It gives me great joy to share my books and information with my classmates and to know that I have helped to spark their interest. I was even inspired by my research to write poetry which reflects upon my questions of the universe. This poem is called “A Moonless Night.” Some of the fantastic books that I have read that seemed to almost quench my thirst for knowledge are, Albert Einstein and the Theory of Relativity by the Solutions series, Before the Beginning, Just Six Numbers, both by Martin Rees. Actually, these books only make me want to learn more and make me so inquisitive that my questions seem infinite.

This study and research triggered new life goals for me such as being a physicist or a cosmologist, proposing new theories, and aspiring to be like my role models, Stephen Hawking and Albert Einstein. My dream one day is to unlock the ultimate theory of the universe, called the theory of everything, and the ultimate question: the mind of G-D. Just as the very fabric of space-time expands and stretches since the big bang, so does my quest for grasping the ultimate theory; the theory of everything.

Educational Interventions Provided for Evan

Evan was identified as having unique abilities in Grade 3. Throughout the remainder of that year, he participated in enrichment activities in mathematics in his regular classroom. In Grade 4, Evan was identified formally as gifted and talented, and his teachers realized that enrichment was only one of the learning options that he needed to fulfill his potential. They collaborated and recommended two different learning options for his remaining two years in elementary school. In Grades 4 and 5, he participated in a pull-out enrichment class in language arts and mathematics. In addition, he worked on accelerated content in mathematics through the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth (CTY) program.

In middle school, Evan’s teachers provided him with additional acceleration options. He was advanced to eighth-grade mathematics and seventh-grade science. In Grade 7, he
was subsequently placed in ninth-grade math and eighth-grade science. In addition, a high school teacher traveled to the middle school every day to work with Evan and a small group of 10 eighth graders as they investigated mathematical topics aligned with the eighth-grade curriculum, in more depth.

Evan is currently in eighth grade. Although he was given the option to skip a grade, he decided to stay with his friends. He goes to the high school in the morning, where he takes honors biology with 9th and 10th graders and Algebra II with 10th and 11th graders. His English teacher nurtures his love of nonfiction and, at the same time, challenges him to explore fiction as well. He volunteers as a mathematics tutor and mentor to students in Grades 6, 7, and 10. He continues to love physics and, according to Evan, “It is the year of Einstein.”

Julia

Almost three years ago, at age 9, Julia and her family arrived in North Carolina from the Ukraine. There she had been recognized as a rising young musician. Her parents remember that, even as a baby, Julia hummed, tapped, waved, and spun her way through the days. When she was four, teachers in her preschool noted her perfect pitch and strong sense of rhythm. Her subsequent evaluation by the school’s director of music confirmed Julia’s exceptional abilities, which then led to twice-weekly, short piano lessons. Rather than shrink from the attention and work in the following months, Julia needed to be “pulled from the piano,” her mother said. At her first small recital, Julia surprised (no, shocked) her teacher and her mother by substituting one of her own secret compositions for the piece printed in the program. There was no doubt then that her gift needed to be nurtured.

Fortunately, Julia was also a good student. While not always the top of her class, she easily, and without effort, received excellent marks. By second grade, she was practicing an hour before school and two hours after. In third grade, just months before emigrating, she was selected to solo in a youth festival with a small community chamber orchestra.

Educational Interventions for Julia

Once Julia’s parents settled their family into their new, small apartment, they enrolled Julia and her brother in the neighborhood school. Their almost nonexistent English made the process slow and uncomfortable, but they trusted that school officials would help balance Julia’s academic requirements with her driving need to spend time at the piano. In the first weeks, Julia was mourning not only the loss of her treasured piano teacher, but also her grandparents, her friends, and, most of all, her piano: the apartment was too small and the cost too great. Immediately the focus at school was on helping Julia become fluent in English and guiding her in the assimilation process. Julia began to shrink back into herself. She found a piano in the back of the school gym and gravitated to it whenever possible, yet, despite the magical sounds coming from that poorly tuned piano, the gym teacher constantly shooed her away. This teacher stated that Julia needed to socialize with others on the playground, not hide behind music.

Within a month, Julia refused to go to school. She first faked headaches, and then began to throw up, but her parents insisted she attend. The classroom teacher sent notes of
concern home and then called for a meeting with the principal. Julia, they said, was emotionally disturbed and required assessment by the school psychologist. The report, while outlining a number of problems and subsequent recommendations for intervention, did not mention music.

Fortunately, Julia’s family attended an evening concert at the church that sponsored their move. The moment the last note sounded, Julia was at the side of the pianist, begging to play. That pianist taught at the community music school and instantly recognized the child’s amazing potential. She not only offered free lessons, but also arranged travel to and from the center. In addition, her husband, a teacher in a neighboring district, began to unravel Julia’s school problems. He arranged for the gym piano to be tuned and moved into a room next to the library. Through a series of creative programming options, Julia was able to practice whenever she completed her class work. She was also allowed to stay indoors during breaks. Far from serving to ostracize her socially, peers were awed by her dedication and skill. Several girls befriended her and banded together to sing fun show tunes together, a far cry from Julia’s regular classical repertoire.

Now, in middle school, Julia is once again rising to the challenge in both academics and music. Her English-language skills are excellent, she is the top student in science, and she represented her school in the citywide, creative writing contest. At school, she is able to squeeze in at least one hour of practice a day. This summer she will be on full scholarship at a residential performing arts program in Canada.

Leron

In 2001, Leron Johnson was one of 10,700 students in a large school district that had a very diverse student population. When Leron attended school in the district, 2% of students were Asian American, 17% were Black, 53% were Hispanic, and 28% were White. Sixty-five percent of the student body was eligible for free or reduced price meals, and 40% of the students, K–12, lived in homes where English was not the primary language. The average per capita income in this urban district was $18,000.

Leron lived with his parents and, as long as he could remember, his mother was his best advocate and a primary support for the family. Many of his friends moved from school to school. Leron’s mother worked hard to keep her son in the same school system because she understood that his education was very important to his future. Leron was a very capable student and, although he was never at the top of his class, his grades were always above average.

Educational Interventions Provided for Leron

Leron was in fourth grade when he was identified for the district’s gifted and talented program that provided him with challenge and enrichment one morning a week. His teachers came to know his many interests. He was especially interested in sports, video games, and technology of all kinds. He was also involved with the Boys Club of America, and adults within the organization encouraged Leron to get involved in leadership and community-based projects. In spite of his many outside activities, Leron’s academic performance was always B or better.
In middle school, Leron attended a pull-out resource room gifted program one day a week. All his teachers, including his gifted education teacher, encouraged him to maintain his academic pursuits in spite of some negative peer pressure to lead him astray. They also encouraged him to develop his skills as an athlete.

In high school, Leron’s passion for sports grew stronger. He played basketball for two years and participated in track. His real love, however, was football, and his coach, who supported his athletic abilities. He became one of the stars on the team by his sophomore year. Leron played on the team all four years, including his last year when he was elected captain. He was recognized by the state interscholastic athletic organization as a scholar athlete.

Other teachers propelled Leron forward in his academics. Mr. Robert Owens, technology coordinator in the district, developed a strong liking for Leron and his constant desire to learn more about technology, especially video production. During his four years in high school, Leron completed several independent video projects including one documentary on local arts. While Mr. Owens was in the background to support him, Leron always took the lead on these investigations. All of the gifted education staff enjoyed having Leron in the program because of his intellectual curiosity and exceptional interpersonal skills.

During his junior year, Leron developed an early interest in attending Yale University. He made a point to attend the Yale summer football camp, where Yale scouts saw him play. The scouts talked to Leron about his passion for football and his grades and followed his progress in high school throughout the first semester of his senior year. Leron’s high school counselors made sure he was enrolled in honors and Advanced Placement courses and lined up important letters of recommendation. They made sure he had complete information about a wide variety of colleges and universities. Late in the fall of 2001, Yale offered Leron a full, four-year scholarship to the university.

Leron graduated from Yale in May 2005. He majored in business and finance, and he has already been offered a job in investment banking on Wall Street. Leron returns to his high school on a regular basis. He finds great satisfaction visiting his former teachers and mentoring members of the high school football team.

Gail

Gail was taller than the average 5-year-old when she entered the K/1 classroom in the fall of 2003. She was the older of two children; her brother was three years younger. Her mother was an assistant professor with a demanding work schedule, so her father assumed responsibilities as the primary caregiver in the family. He transported Gail to and from school and frequently volunteered in the classroom. He was actively involved in both children’s activities.

Gail was a highly verbal and social child who did not enjoy learning alone. She thrived in an interactive social environment with peers who were at similar academic and social levels.

Although she enjoyed interactions with other girls, she thrived in competitive activities and played sports and games with boys. She worked well with children of either sex, but her best friends were boys. She had a unique (and irreverent) sense of humor and loved the book series Captain Underpants by Dave Pilkey. Her parents valued and supported her strong sense of self, her assertiveness, and her competitive nature.
When the teacher met Gail, she was reading elementary chapter books fluently at the second-grade level. She loved reading and discussing books with her friends. By the end of first grade, she moved through six grade levels, reading with comprehension at the eighth-grade level. She was an avid reader throughout her time in the K/1 classroom and often read books with content well beyond her emotional level.

Gail was not one to sit quietly. She was an exceptionally active child. Sitting in large-group time was difficult for her. She needed an environment where she could be actively involved with learning tools and other children. Gail was a very talented child who did not fit the stereotype of a quiet, calm kindergarten girl. Indeed, she may not have been accepted in a typical kindergarten classroom.

**Educational Interventions for Gail**

Because of her precocity, Gail’s parents chose an early childhood program with peers and reading materials available beyond her chronological age level. Nevertheless, the teacher found it challenging to provide appropriate literature that matched her social and emotional needs and yet was difficult enough to extend her growth in reading, a common problem for many early readers. By the end of first grade, she was reading the *Narnia* series by C. S. Lewis.

It was important to provide her with peers who were at similar reading and math levels, but also time to engage in in-depth investigation. The curriculum of the early childhood program enabled her to explore a wide variety of interests and pursue challenging investigations that promoted growth in her reading, math, and social skills. The program dedicated one hour each day to a free-choice activity that encouraged students to stay engaged in a single activity such as reading or a long-term project. If Gail wanted to read for an hour, she had the flexibility to do so.

The teacher worked hard to help Gail fit in socially with the rest of the class. Although he recognized Gail and others’ competitive spirits, the teacher emphasized cooperative learning and tried to maintain a noncompetitive environment. To prevent gender bias in the classroom, he encouraged cross-gender interaction. He provided an environment that allowed Gail to work with students of either sex. The teacher stressed with the whole class how important it was to have a school experience where they learned how to work and get along with everyone. Through discussions, arrangements of groups, and requests to continually try working with different students, the teacher developed flexible social groups. In doing so, the teacher created a safe environment where students could take emotional and social risks and engage in nonstereotypical behaviors.

**Bao**

Bao is a 10-year-old, fifth-grade student who lives in Iowa. He was born in Hong Kong, but identifies himself as Vietnamese. He believes that his parents moved to Hong Kong from North Vietnam so that it would be easier for them to immigrate to the United States. Bao lives with his parents, his 12-year-old sister, and his 5-year-old brother.

Bao moved to the United States with his family when he was four. He has no memories of living in Hong Kong, but has some memories of his first home in Kansas City, Missouri. His mother worked in the home and his father worked two jobs—“one with glass and one making clothes.”
When Bao was five, his family moved to Iowa and his parents began working for a meat processing plant. His parents work each afternoon until midnight, so Bao mainly sees them on weekday mornings and on weekends.

When he first began school, Bao stated that he was “scared to make friends” because his English-language skills were limited. He didn’t want to raise his hand and felt frustrated in class. Bao received English as a second language (ESL) services for kindergarten and first grade, which helped him to learn English faster and “feel the same as other kids.” In ESL classes, Bao felt that he “sort of” was able to show his true abilities. “I knew to read and write to show how smart I was. I learned English faster than the other kids and got them mostly all right so I sort of knew I was smart then.”

Learning English rapidly had many positive effects. He has become more comfortable participating actively in classroom discussions and interacting with his classmates—resulting in new friends who provide Bao with a support system at school. He also reports an increased sense of responsibility about helping his parents, who are not yet conversant in English, communicate in the community.

After scoring at the superior level on several standardized tests in third and fourth grade, Bao qualified for the fifth-grade Talented and Gifted (TAG) pull-out and the math mentoring program. The formal identification as a gifted learner increased Bao’s self-efficacy, but his comments also provide some insight into his needs as a learner. He explained that he wished he had been told that he was gifted prior to fifth grade. “I did not know how smart I was.” Now, he stated that he knows he is talented because “I think fast and I read fast!”

In the future, Bao wants to be an orthodontist or join the U.S. Marine Corps. “I want to serve our country because they gave us a place to live and my parents a job and I want to give something back.”

Educational Interventions for Bao

As previously mentioned, the gifted and talented program in Bao’s school begins in the fifth grade for all identified students. Bao qualified for two different components: math mentoring and pull-out enrichment. The math mentoring component consisted of weekly meetings with a mentor to discuss and work on mathematics problems that were either extensions of Bao’s regular classroom work or problems that were of particular interest to him. The pull-out enrichment component involved four different units that spanned the academic year: Orientation, Thinking Skills, Career Exploration, and Independent Study. In the orientation unit, Bao learned about giftedness, his unique learning profile, group dynamics, and communication skills. In the thinking skills unit, he was provided with explicit instruction about critical thinking, creative thinking, how to reflect on and regulate his own thinking, and problem-solving strategies. Bao had the opportunity to explore careers in the third unit and, not surprisingly, Bao elected to learn more about careers in mathematics. Finally, he had the opportunity to pursue an independent project of his choice.

Daquanna

When Daquanna was 3 years old, she entered an early childhood program that her older brother was already attending. She was petite and reluctant to interact with unfamiliar
adults, but she loved to draw and sculpt images of people. She would spend hours every
day quietly working at her art desk set up for her by her grandparents at home.
Daquanna’s mother often volunteered in the classroom, and she was concerned about
Daquanna’s physical health and verbal development due to a hearing impairment caused
by frequent childhood ear infections, which necessitated that she wear a hearing aid.

As Daquanna entered elementary school, her mother often shared information with
her teachers about her own experiences in school and how she felt unchallenged. She was
keenly interested in providing challenging academic experiences for her children and
concerned about Daquanna’s reluctance to actively engage in educational settings. So,
Daquanna and her brother were highly scheduled in afterschool enrichment activities
such as Kumon math, dance, gymnastics, art, and violin lessons.

Due in most part to her disability, Daquanna was an extremely shy and quiet child.
When she talked, she almost whispered. Her teachers described her as highly sensitive,
insightful, and caring and noted that Daquanna was always concerned about her
own achievement level and frequently sought approval when she tried new things.
Furthermore, she rarely took risks until she was familiar with all aspects of a learning
experience. She worked best with constant individual support. She frequently asked, “Is
this right?” and she constantly questioned herself and her skills. She typically avoided aca-
demics, but enjoyed the creative activities that were available in her school. She especially
liked drawing, art, and music. The one class each week where she worked independently
and was willing to take risks was art. Her artistic skill became especially apparent when
she received a first-place ribbon in a districtwide competition for a sculpture of herself,
which included details that reflected her cultural heritage and ethnicity.

Despite her success in art and her family’s continued support, Daquanna’s teachers sus-
pected that she was still not working up to her full potential. Based on her family history and
her reluctance to pursue academics, they feared that without needed support, Daquanna
had the potential for being an underachiever.

**Educational Interventions for Daquanna**

As she entered elementary school, the main intervention for Daquanna was to
increase her self-efficacy and provide her with some additional tools for interacting with
peers and adults. In grades K–2, a speech pathologist worked with Daquanna twice each week
to help her feel less self-conscious about communicating with others and more con-
fident about her verbal skills. The speech pathologist also met with Daquanna’s family to
discuss how they could support her progress at home and in the community while at the
same time encouraging her interests in art.

In the regular classroom, Daquanna’s second-grade teacher tried to nurture independent-
leaning skills and carefully chose materials that provided the right amount of challenge
and a high level of interest. He especially chose to include activities that capitalized on
Daquanna’s creativity and artistic skills. Throughout the school day, he provided her with
a safe environment where she could take risks and make mistakes. He focused on positive
social supports to develop appropriate assertiveness and negotiation skills. The teacher
also talked her through tasks and then asked her to work independently through those
same activities. Gradually, he was able to work with her in a small-group setting when
new skills were presented. He then asked Daquanna if she would like more support, and
reinforced those skills with the small group before leaving her to work in the larger group
with others or on her own.
While the curriculum itself was not changed for Daquanna, the pacing and degree of support was. These adjustments allowed Daquanna to progress at her own rate and provided her with opportunities to work in her strength areas of art and music.

Currently, her performance on assessments still varies according to her level of confidence. Her newfound comfort in unfamiliar learning environments was apparent as she successfully transitioned to an intermediate school last fall. Daquanna’s interest in the arts remains strong and additional exploration and enrichment activities are planned for her in the upcoming year.

**Todd**

Todd is a very bright high school junior. As he looks back at his childhood, he recognizes that it was complicated by many factors. His parents separated when he was young, and he has not been in touch with his father since before kindergarten. In addition, as much as he looks up to his siblings and receives positive encouragement from them, Todd mentions that one older sibling has a physical disability and another struggles with bipolar disorder. Dealing with such physical and psychological difficulties significantly contributes to the stress his family experiences at home. He says that he has experienced a lot of turmoil and has had to grow up quickly as a result.

Todd was identified as gifted and talented in elementary school. As he reflects on that time, he remembers enjoying these programs because he felt more challenged and because he remembers being with students of similar ability levels. Through junior high and high school, he took advantage of course acceleration and honors courses and now says that he had good teachers at the schools he has attended.

However, things changed for Todd early in his high school career when he got into a fight and subsequently felt he was no longer welcome at school. Complicating the situation, two of Todd’s older siblings had been expelled from the same high school. This only furthered Todd’s feeling of alienation, especially by the school’s administration. Looking to escape his seeming negative reputation, Todd decided to seek a fresh start at the alternative school in his town.

**Educational Interventions for Todd**

When Todd relocated to an alternative high school for the remainder of his public school career, teachers and other professionals provided him with five different interventions. First, the alternative high school environment provided a much smaller teacher-student ratio. His teachers had a genuine interest in young people. Second, teachers at the school were provided with learning profiles of each of the students involved in the Iowa Alternative Schools Project. Although many knew that Todd was a very capable young man, they were provided with his ability-based assessment results. These scores provided a unique learning profile that highlighted his reasoning ability strengths, as well as his learning gaps. Third, and based on his learning profile, Todd was provided with additional academic challenges in his interest areas. One offering that was especially meaningful to Todd was an online Advanced Placement (AP) psychology course. Todd had always been interested in people and he took on the distance learning opportunity with great enthusiasm. Todd also had a mentor, selected for him by the school principal. His mentor turned out to
be his AP psychology course facilitator. The last intervention was continuous professional development for the entire staff at the alternative high school. As part of the Iowa Alternative Schools Project, funded by the federal Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program, staff have been offered the opportunity to attend three days of summer training on issues related to gifted and talented learners, such as underachievement, socio-emotional needs of gifted students, and classroom differentiation strategies.

Maria

In her acceptance speech as a recipient of a nationally sponsored award for gifted high school students, Maria, a senior at Rolling Hills High School in California, spoke eloquently of the challenges that many gifted students in isolated areas face:

Living on an Indian Reservation, one is constantly exposed to negativity, violence, and drug abuse. I am not like anyone in my neighborhood and not even like the rest of my family. I am determined to make something of my life, not flipping burgers or picking fruits in someone else’s field. I won’t mimic my cousins who married young and got pregnant. I am very different! I have always taken the harder path to improve myself. I work hard so I will be able to give my parents all the things they never had. . . . My father always tells me, “Trabaja duro y así vas a poder llegar muy alto y realizar tus sueños.” [If you work hard, you will go far and will be able to realize your dreams.] My father’s words guide me to achieve my aspirations, even though I sometimes feel insecure, frightened by where my life will lead. I will succeed!

Maria’s drive and determination to attend college and become a pediatrician or a psychologist are matched only by her academic talents and interest in learning. Her science teacher commented that, “to say she is a fantastic student is to say Joe Montana was just a good football player.” Her quest for knowledge became even more apparent when her home was destroyed by a raging wildfire in the fall of her senior year. Rushing with her family out of the building to safety, Maria grabbed her books because she didn’t want to fall behind in school.

Educational Interventions for Maria

Even though Maria’s small, rural school did not have a formal gifted program, her connection with her school community and parental support and encouragement helped her overcome many obstacles. As a Mexican American immigrant, she began school with a stronger grasp of Spanish than English, which often led teachers to see her as a shy and reluctant learner. Nevertheless, she worked diligently to perfect her English, and with the encouragement of her junior high teachers, she found her voice and her gift for leadership. Maria participated in soccer and softball after school; but her real passion was her involvement and leadership in service organizations. While maintaining a 4.10 GPA and taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses in government, anatomy and physiology, and Spanish, Maria also served as president of the Key Club, vice president of the National Honor Society, and as a four-year member of the
California Scholarship Federation and the AVID Leadership Conference. When a wildfire ripped through her community in the late fall of her senior year, Maria stepped forward to volunteer with the Red Cross to translate for non-English-speaking fire victims at FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) meetings. She acknowledges that her involvement was an inspiration to others, but that she really got involved so that she could be part of the solution and feel like she was helping to reassemble all of the lives that were disrupted by the fire.

Despite all of the odds against her, Maria started college at the University of San Diego in the fall of 2004. Her school counselor and AP science teacher, who both played an integral role in helping Maria with her college planning and finding a variety of funding sources, anticipate her continued success because of her hard work and persistence. As the first member of her family to attend college, she is dedicated to making her dreams of becoming a doctor come true.

**SUMMARY**

The case studies presented here serve three purposes. First, they help to remind us of the joyful reasons we all entered the teaching profession: our love for all children, our interest in sharing part of their life’s journey, and our desire to help young people find affinity and fulfillment in a field that interests them.

Second, they remind us about the diversity among children with whom we will engage in the 21st century. The case studies have been selected to illustrate the variety of students and the range of education needs in our classrooms and programs. Although they have all found success in school, these students do not represent *showcase* portraits, the kind that dazzle. Rather, they are solid portraits: real, familiar, and illustrative of the key role practitioners play in finding and developing student talent.

Finally, the case studies serve as a unique foundation for this guidebook. Together, they illustrate some of its most important principles:

- Gifted and talented students are a very diverse group of students. They sit in every classroom, pre-K–12, in America and come from all ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultures.
- Gifts and talents may be obvious, latent, or emergent, which underscores the need for careful development and maintenance of all aspects of gifted programming and service components.
- High-achieving young people have a unique set of learning needs that set them apart from others, including prior knowledge, readiness to learn, interests, learning-style preference, and a propensity for a particular expression style. As a result, learning opportunities for gifted learners must be designed with the child’s specific needs in mind and consist of a continuum of differentiated curricular options, instructional approaches, and resource materials.
- Appropriate gifted education programs and services must be provided both in the regular classroom and in special programs. Gifted and talented students need well-trained and appropriately qualified educators who can provide ongoing levels of challenge every day of the students’ school career.
Readers will see these principles emerge as touchstones in slightly different ways and forms in each of the remaining chapters in this guidebook. It is our hope that the cases—and their common, underlying principles—will serve as an additional catalyst to help readers grapple more effectively and efficiently with the content presented here.

**MUST-READ RESOURCES**


**REFERENCES**


DESIGNING SERVICES AND PROGRAMS FOR HIGH-ABILITY LEARNERS


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