Preface

Advocates for gifted and talented students have been working for decades in an attempt to bring full service to this population. Under a full-service model, students of high ability are in educational programs that are challenging and coordinate with their unique needs. Such a situation is rare despite the efforts of professionals throughout the educational spectrum. This situation is due to many factors, all of which are important and need to be addressed. In the meantime, thousands of students are in educational environments that do not correspond to their advanced abilities.

In a prior book, *Gifted Students in Regular Classrooms* (Parke, 1989), I addressed the need for gifted and talented students, placed in regular classroom structures, to receive appropriate programming options. At first this concept met with a great deal of criticism from professional colleagues, as they were concerned that this point of view could jeopardize efforts to build specialized classes outside the regular classroom for these students. "Why would you write a book about this topic if it means people use it as an excuse to cut the few programs that are already in place?" My rationale was simple. For the most part, gifted and talented students spend the vast majority of their time *in* general-education classrooms. It is essential that the instruction they receive, wherever that may be, coordinate with the learning needs they possess. Teachers need to be trained to organize their classrooms to deal with the multiple abilities their students display. I had hoped that my book would be just a small part of that effort. From the response the book received after publication, I believe I met that goal.

Unfortunately, the students' situation has not changed a great deal. Gifted and talented students are still receiving the bulk of their instruction through the general-education structure (Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, & Slavin, 1992). Advocates continue to lobby policymakers from local school boards, intermediate districts, state boards of education, and Washington, D.C., for additional funds and program offerings. Surprisingly, the concern for potential student underachievement has not been seriously addressed at the local level despite the current school reform initiatives. The change that has been called for has yet to emerge.

What has changed is the voice from within the gifted-child education field. Openly, people are discussing the value of modifying the name

under which programs are organized. The question is asked, "Can we be more successful in developing a full-service model for these students if we find a new label for their needs?" The label in dispute is *gifted*. It connotes students who have an advantage that has not been afforded to all. The label comes under attack because it sounds as if the students to whom it is attached are "special" in some way rather than "different" in their learning needs. In a country where we value the rags-to-riches stories and applaud those who have lived the American dream, it is difficult to sell the idea that there are students who are at risk due to their capability. The question continues to be asked, "Why funnel resources to a population that is already ahead of the game?"

The question deserves an answer rather than indignation. Perhaps a new label would make serious discussions more likely to result in change. Maybe the research being federally funded at the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut, Storrs, will establish *difference* and *need* in a way that will be understood and addressed by those who control program design and funding. Possibly, the emergence of the multiple-intelligence models (Gardner, 1983; Sternberg, 1986; Wagner, 2000) will be the basis for a fresh restructuring of educational instruction that will be matched to the multiple talents of students.

Perhaps . . . maybe . . . perchance . . . conceivably . . . possibly . . . These words provide little comfort for the students, parents, and teachers who are currently part of our educational systems. They need some degree of relief now. Under the circumstances of limited funds and expanding expectations, what can reasonably be done? There are answers, and that is the topic of this book.

It is my hope that this book will give these constituencies a new perspective on the topic of program development for students with exceptional ability. I take a talent development perspective and apply it to a program mosaic model. My contention is that there are many programs, currently on the books and readily accepted, through which talented students can find challenge and growth of their abilities. These are programs that are not under the aegis of gifted-child education but can be adopted to create a more appropriate educational experience for this population.

I do wish to offer one caution to the reader. The philosophy behind and content of *Discovering Programs for Talent Development* should not be used as a platform for dismantling programs currently offered for talented students. Programmatic suggestions that appear here should be supplemental to the rigorous programs currently offered. The needs of these students are so vast, and the program development needed so daunting, that making the best use of all resources available is essential. It is to this end that I offer this book.

Finally, I would like to relate a story that was told to me through a holiday card this season (thanks, Cindy). The Masai tribe of Africa has a greeting that they use to acknowledge those they meet. The greeting is, "How are the children?" This is not reserved for those who have children. Rather, it is a way to recognize that the children are the focus of the tribe. I end with the same question, *"How are the children?"*

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