

California Perspective : A Reflection from Another State

Charmy Perry

Even in the two years since I retired as a regional coordinator for Gifted Education in the greater Rochester, New York area, changes in educational policies and practice continue to impact both general education and gifted education. However, in reflecting on my nearly 30 years in the field of K-12 gifted education, I am convinced that we can identify several principles that remain unchanged and are foundational to the effectiveness and success of any educator in gifted education.

- 1. Understanding the local, state, and national context for gifted education is critical for achieving effective practice for educators and successful outcomes for students.** In New York State, gifted education must function without a mandate, without state funding, and with little chance of any change in these factors. As a Race to the Top state, major priorities are being given to the implementation of the NYS Common Core Learning Standards, the requirements of new assessments, the implementation of a high stakes APPR system for teachers and principals, along with all the corresponding budgeting. In New York State, the legitimacy of gifted education is not automatic; it must be earned. This is not the case in most states, and we in NYS must continue to stay attuned to the national conversation about gifted education.
- 2. Finding ways to connect to general education, special education, and the priorities of districts greatly enhances the visibility and credibility of gifted education.** It is imperative for gifted educators to find ways to make their expertise indispensable as districts pursue their priorities. In our region of New York State, I worked with gifted education teachers and administrators to examine the ELA Common Core Learning Standards and make the very obvious and important connection to critical thinking. Given that developing critical thinking has been a hallmark of gifted education for decades, gifted educators can assist their general education colleagues to understand and intentionally design units and lessons that require these important thinking skills. In addition, gifted educators can bring an understanding of concepts and big ideas to district curriculum work that seeks to require critical and creative thinking, promote understanding, and increase rigor. In conjunction with this, gifted educators can provide a wide array of high level resources that can be used in meaningful ways to promote student thinking and lead to genuine understanding.
- 3. Modeling professional learning and professional practices builds the credibility of gifted educators.** It is so important for those in gifted education to embrace their ongoing need for professional development. Throughout my career, I always viewed myself as a student. Gifted educators need to have a desire to understand their craft in more sophisticated ways. I found that the more deeply I understood what it means to design curriculum that is advanced, challenging, and rigorous, the more I was sought out as a resource not only for my colleagues in gifted education, but also more widely for teachers and administrators in many different school districts. With a more sophisticated

understanding of how the Common Core Learning Standards fit together with the elements of depth and complexity, critical thinking, and differentiation, gifted educators have the potential to become highly regarded instructional leaders.

- 4. A commitment to excellence and a strong work ethic are non-negotiables for those in the field of gifted education.** At least this is the case in New York State where legitimacy has to be earned and existence is not guaranteed. In order for gifted programs and services to continue and flourish, there cannot be skepticism among general education teachers, administrators, and parents, about the quality and value of what goes on in the gifted program. Units of study, lessons and learning experiences must be high quality through and through; they must be worth the time and effort expended by both teacher and students. Quality design and implementation requires time and hard work. If gifted educators are willing to commitment whatever it takes to produce excellence, their standing in the school district will be strengthened.

Although the changing landscape in K-12 education continues to affect the field of gifted education, there are some foundational principles that can strengthen gifted education and the effectiveness and success of gifted educators.